

University of Pennsylvania  
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**Penn Studio Culture**  
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If an anthropologist from another society (or even another discipline) were to visit our design studios, how would they describe and explain the culture they find there? What are its beliefs and rituals, how are they regulated, and how are disagreements negotiated.

### **Description of the Culture of Design Studio at Penn**

There are three classes of participants in the design studio culture: the primary participants are students and faculty, with a variety of staff engaged at different levels.

The design studio provides a work environment approximating the tools, arrangements, and conditions of a professional architectural office. As professional practice changed so has the design studio, with the adoption of digital media having a powerful effect.

The mode of education combines some aspects of a professional apprenticeship with aspects of a laboratory classroom. The guiding ethic is learning by doing, with other supporting courses offered in a more conventional classroom format. Studios have 12 formal contact hours, though critics are often present for m

What would happen if design was taught in a classroom format?

The design studio itself is a highly territorial, quasi-residential environment with dedicated work space for individual students. Groups of students are organized in pedagogical units according to the studio critic with whom they are working. The pedagogical units are re-organized each semester, with students relocating according to the studio critic to whom they are assigned.

What would happen if students stayed in the same desk?  
or were organized in other kinds of groupings?  
or had no dedicated desks and worked elsewhere?

The semi-private space of the design studio is complemented by the public space of design reviews, from pin-ups in corridors and the corners of studio to mid- and final-reviews in public galleries. In a manner approximating the demands of professional practice, students post or display their work in progress for comments, criticisms, and suggesting by visiting jurors. This is highly ritualized process, with many variations, but involves discussions of the students particular abilities and achievements with more general and open conversations about the studio, the topic, the role of architecture, etc.

Desk Crits.: See Schön, *The Reflective Practitioner...*