

IIDA 2020
STUDENT ROUNDTABLE

It Takes A Village: The Integral Roles of Design



IIDA



DALLAS | SEATTLE



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Key Takeaways

Front cover, clockwise from top right:
Ashley Oliberos, Student IIDA, Bellevue College;
Dallas Panelists; Laura Nelson Fralick, Ind. IIDA
Merylin Ortac, Student IIDA, Bellevue College

This page, clockwise from top left:
Staci Miller, Student IIDA, Bellevue College;
Tyson Byers, Andersen Construction



Attendees

Dallas:

Moderator:

James Kerrigan, FIIDA
Design Principal
Jacobs

Panelists:

Brian Barnes
Architect, Interior Designer
Principal
Entos Design

Lisa Chill
Director for Interiors Solutions
Jacobs

Timothy B. Jackson
Program Management Office
(PMO) Director, Americas
Account Team
Cushman And Wakefield

Jennifer King, IIDA
Project Manager
DLR Group| Staffellbach

Bari Larsen
Senior Project Manager
Wells Fargo

Kaitlin Snow, Industry IIDA
Design Sales Manager
OFS

Seattle:

Moderator:

Susana Covarrubias, IIDA
IIDA International Board President
Design Director
Gensler

Panelists:

Molly Addington, IIDA
Associate
Gensler

CJ Brockway
Principal
Sparklab Lighting Design

Tyson Byers
Senior Project Manager
Andersen Construction

Tim Jones
Vice President
Jones Lang Lasalle Brokerage, Inc.

Sarah Merriman
Design Manager
Corporate Facilities
Starbucks

Susan Stinnett
VP Sales
Commercial Office Interiors

Mike McFarland
Owner
VPI Representatives / Furniture
Consultants

From left to right:
Molly Addington, IIDA, Gensler;
Bellevue College; Scott Davis,
Robert Ustanik, Student IIDA





Introduction

We're all
in this
together



.....

The next generation of designers is entering a world that may seem uncertain, but is always hopeful. Through the right experience and training, emerging designers will be uniquely ready to take on new challenges.

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Design, like life, is made up of a complex system of connections, processes, tools, and collaborations. Understanding the integral roles and responsibilities within these networks is as important as design itself. With the world in constant flux, the ways in which we join forces both professionally and personally continue to shift.

It takes a village...

Relationships are what power the design process—projects are only as successful as the teams that develop them. Beyond the drafting table or the studio floor are connections created with other design professionals, which are vital in launching our projects out into the world.

The success of any design idea you have is reliant on the people around you—those who can support it, bring it to life, activate it, and ultimately, fund it. The need for contributions from this diverse network of experts is what makes the design profession—and industry—a rich and varied confluence of minds and experiences.

In order to reflect on the practice of design and highlight the unique

processes that define and fuel our community, IIDA gathered two panels of industry experts in Dallas and Seattle in late 2019 to describe their experiences within the industry and explain how their varied positions intersect and interact throughout the creation of great design.

The purpose of these roundtables was to help students and new designers gain a deeper understanding of the many sides of the industry, the shifting landscape of design in the context of our modern world, and how to be equipped when beginning a new job. You can use this report to help you navigate the world of design, post-graduation and beyond.





Questions & Talking Points

The main points of focus during both IIDA Student Roundtable events ranged from technical insights into design jobs and personal anecdotes regarding client relationships, to the state of the industry and the creative process.

Panelists were provided the prompts listed on this page to keep in mind as they interacted with one another. You may utilize them as reference points for future conversations with mentors, industry leaders, or design professionals you admire.

1. What is your background and how did you arrive at your current position?
2. What is your current position and what is your day-to-day like?
3. How would you describe your role in the design process? Where does your work begin and end?
4. What does collaborating with your peers entail and who are your most direct stakeholders?
5. In your experience, what are the steps of bringing a design project to fruition?
6. What does collaboration look like across different roles and responsibilities? How do you usually advocate for your portion of the design process?
7. What is the design collaboration etiquette and how does it play out during a real project? At what point in the process do you need to be polite and when can you stand your ground?



From left to right:
Seattle Panelists and Moderator; Anna Spencer, VPI



Trust the Process

THE DESIGN PROCESS IN THE REAL WORLD

Exploring and understanding all of the different opportunities within the field of design is key to finding your passion and building a strong professional network.

Jennifer King, IIDA, a project manager at DLR Group | Staffelbach, describes her journey into the interior design industry as a leap of faith—one that ultimately allowed her to pursue her calling. After selecting “interior design” as a major at Texas Tech University purely on a whim, King realized that design is what she wanted to do with the rest of her life. “What I know of my position now, I did not understand it then,” she says.

What she did understand, however, was that interior design felt right. And it wasn’t just the creative process that got her invested, it was the interpersonal relationships and melding of the minds that went into every aspect of the profession. As a project manager, King experiences

all stages of a design project from start to finish. This gives her unique insight into how design teams cooperate internally and externally, and what it takes to bring a design idea into the real world.

A design project doesn’t just miraculously come into being; it takes a team of individuals with unique and necessary roles working together to achieve a singular goal. **Sarah Merriman**, the design manager of corporate facilities at Starbucks, says that this complex system isn’t always obvious. “For my internal clients, I need to show them that projects don’t happen overnight; I have to continuously educate them on the process for every different role on the design team.”

So, what exactly does this process look like? It’s complicated, but according to **Timothy B. Jackson**, PMO director of Cushman and Wakefield, it is often a controlled chaos that gets the job done. He notes that the systems and inner workings of design aren’t always easy to understand, even for those working internally: “When I was just starting out, I wish that I had a

forum like this so that I could hear how people went from degree to design and to hear them describe the dynamics of their roles and relationships on the job,” he says.

As someone that has frequently worked in a project manager role, Jackson wants designers and architects to “talk to me like I am five years old so that I can communicate that information with different people at different levels.” There are often many players on any given design team, from project managers and designers to contractors, sales managers, and creative directors. When working on a team that includes a plethora of roles, being as direct and forthright as possible every step of the way ensures that members are all on the same page, fully understand, and can effectively communicate information about a project by using their own vocabulary.

Jackson himself is not a designer and focuses on the management, scheduling, and oversight of project delivery, boasting a proven track record of ‘on time and on budget.’ “My perspective

is different from a designer’s,” he says. “Though I am also thinking about the look and feel, I am focusing on the cost and on time management. And when I tell you I need something...I need it faster than that.”

For **Susan Stinnett**, vice president of sales for Commercial Officer Interiors, working closely with a wide range of people is intrinsic to her sales-oriented role. “I provide furniture solutions to clients, and I communicate and collaborate with anyone from raw materials producers to project managers and product consultants,” she says. “The collaboration never stops.” Her job is all about collaborating with the diverse teams that are involved in every step of the process needed to make environments come to life.

No matter who you are in the design world, you are part of a larger ecosystem with many different parts that determine and define design excellence in their own way. Finding your place and discovering where you and your skills best fit is a crucial part of your overall professional experience.





FINDING YOUR PEOPLE, YOUR CRAFT, AND YOURSELF

Design experts cited the importance of discovering who you are while on the job and finding your place in the design community.

While teams are indispensable to any given design project, it is important—especially for young designers and up-and-coming design professionals—to discover and focus on their individual niches. Your position is valuable and essential to the process of design no matter your role, and we all need and want each other to be successful.

Though you will be consistently working closely with different numerous people throughout the course of a project, you will need to understand how to uphold and champion your role within collaboration. Additionally, no matter how many people are on your team, you will be your own cheerleader when it comes to presenting to clients and convincing them you are the right person for a job. Knowing your presentation style and being able to clearly describe the work you do within a team setting will make the project process more seamless.

EMBRACE CHANGE

Understand that as your career evolves, so will your skills and interests, which will allow you to be flexible within your professional life and potentially try on different hats. While you should feel comfortable as an expert in your niche, opportunities beyond your purview could present themselves at any moment. Sometimes, it will be beneficial to take them—if not for your own personal set of abilities but for your understanding of how the design process operates.

“Your inspiration or your goals may change as your career changes,” says **Kaitlin Snow Ind. IIDA**, design sales manager at OFS. “You have to be prepared for that, and for potentially adapting your skills to fit new roles.” Design is always changing, and so is the industry, so it is important to keep yourself involved in the many different aspects of the profession.

IN DESIGN, YOU HAVE OPTIONS

Before you become comfortable presenting who you are to your team and your clients, you must know exactly what it is you want to do within design and what role suits you best. This path isn’t always clear-cut and often requires some exploration. Remember that you do not have to fully know yourself by the time you graduate. The design industry is expansive and evolving; careers can take you places you never imagined and what you are interested in today may not be your dream career tomorrow. “I urge you to explore all opportunities and pursue your passion, rather than pursuing a job.” says Jackson.

IT’S NOT JUST A JOB

Students at both roundtables were curious about how designers and design professionals maintain passion for their work over the course of their careers. “How do you keep up to date with goings-on in the industry and within the profession?” asked **Katherine White, Student IIDA**. “Design isn’t just a job, it’s a lifestyle,” says **Lisa Chill**, director for interiors solutions at Jacobs. “After a while, it becomes more than what you do, and more who you are.”

Chill recommends that aside from doing research and asking introspective questions on the job, you should always be checking in with design news and sourcing inspiration to take back into your work. Additionally, you should consume what is interesting to you—whether it be visual art, theater, literature, or film—and make it applicable to your craft.



Collaboration Is King

DESIGN. COLLABORATION. ETIQUETTE.

Forming relationships, collaborating both professionally and creatively, and all the caveats along the way.

Navigating and maintaining relationships throughout the design process is critical to the success of everyone involved in a project. If you're a designer, the people you communicate with on a daily basis are almost never exclusively fellow designers. Relationships with manufacturers or contractors, for example, are imperative to developing and realizing any built environment.

Collaboration can and will look differently depending on the project type and your role. From creative collaborations between designers and project managers to technical communications between contractors and manufacturers, everyone needs to trust and depend on each other in order to get things done. "We're all working together to solve problems, and we don't take that lightly," says **Molly Addington, IIDA**, an associate at Gensler.

Addington's team has cultivated a special relationship with their contractors based on mutual trust and respect for creative decision-making. "Because we have so much going on, it's important that we trust each other and we are on the same page," she says. There

are always many people involved in a project so it's necessary to "keep open lines of communication and make sure everyone is understanding each other," adds Snow.

King also highlighted the importance of knowing exactly who you are going to be collaborating and communicating with while on any given job. Designers are almost never siloed away; instead, there is a sprawling network of people in positions responsible for their role in getting a design from paper into the real world.

Which is why collaboration only truly begins with strategy. Before jumping into a collaborative process, goals must be clearly defined, articulated, and agreed upon: where do you want the project to be in five or ten years? How do you want it to adapt? What are your capacity needs? What does a client want versus what do they need? Once your team is able to mutually determine a strategy to move forward, then the work can really begin. "You can design a great space, but if it doesn't meet your or your client's goals, it won't work," says **Bari Larsen**, senior project manager at Wells Fargo.



"How would you articulate the importance of individual relationships within the design process?"

- Katie Bourget, Student IIDA

Communication happens on many different levels so there are many opportunities to articulate specific relationships within a wider collaborative system. "It's important to remember that each distinct relationship holds value differently and every member of a team is a piece in a puzzle," says Bari Larsen.

We're All Here for the Client

Your client is your most important stakeholder, and understanding their vision and presenting your ideas effectively will get you far.

The most important relationship you will make as a design professional—aside from the one with yourself—is the relationship with your client. No matter how much or how little time you spend face-to-face, a client's opinion of you and your work is ultimately what will make or break a project, no matter how good you believe it is.

“Client relationships are the foundation of our industry. We spend a great deal of time, sometimes even years, fostering them,” says Addington. “When it’s all said and done, we are all here for the client.”

Forming bonds

Successful relationships with clients begin with your ability to convince them that you are the one for the job and you will go above and beyond to meet their needs. The trust and confidence that a client has in you will affect the rest of your team.

“The client knows they’re going to be working with you for at least six to twelve months, so that’s an important relationship,” says **Brian Barnes**, architect, interior designer, and principal at Entos Design. “It’s necessary to be comfortable and confident with what you are selling, because ultimately, it’s your team and yourself.”

When it comes to interacting with a client in the day-to-day, a designer is almost never just a designer. “We really become psychologists, brand consultants, lifestyle coaches...you name it,” says **Susana Covarrubias, IIDA**, IIDA International Board President and design director at Gensler. As you try to articulate and cultivate your vision into a reality, clients will come to you with a wide-reaching variety of questions and for advice.



“Basically, whoever you’re working for will look to you for many things and you have to be prepared.”

Aside from providing information and giving advice, what are the touchstones of successfully forming a strong client bond? First and foremost, you must be comfortable and confident in talking about your work, but humble when it comes to the execution and appealing to a client's vision. Confidence is what gets you in the door, but the willingness to step back and negotiate is what keeps a client relationship going strong long-term.

You must also understand who the client is culturally. What do they want their space to represent? How do they want the space to make its occupants feel? Design is a visioning process, and you are helping the client imagine scale, imagery, aesthetics, and the overall effect and personality of a space. Through interactive time with clients, you will help them not only develop their vision more fruitfully but also support who they are as an organization or individual.

Above:
Katie Hogan, Student IIDA, Bellevue College;
Natalie Marzouka Gould, Student IIDA, Bellevue College

Bottom left:
Scott Davis; Susan Stinnett, Commercial Office Interiors





Be flexible...but stand your ground

When it comes to decision-making, whether it's on a business or visual level, the client will and should get the last word. One of the biggest hurdles young designers must overcome is the idea that they will always know best what a client wants and how a space should look. Though they possess the expertise and design eye, a client's vision for their company, organization, or themselves is extremely nuanced. It's important to be respectful, understanding, and flexible when presenting a design project and be prepared for some push back or adjustments.

"When your ideas get changed...you can't take it personally," says **Barnes**, who also warns against becoming too attached to a design project because ultimately, a client's voice is the strongest in the room. "Walking into a space and seeing what you made become a reality is a powerful thing, but it's still the client's vision," he says.

But sometimes, standing your ground as a designer is essential when it comes to defending your ideas or helping a client with a problem that they or a stakeholder may not be familiar with—this wisdom comes gradually, with age, time, and experience. Your clients know what they want but you also have a vision, and you can help them to make decisions that are beneficial to their project or their budget.

"My clients are internal, but they still have expectations," says Larsen. "It's part of my job to help them understand budgeting, saving, to create a better product for all parties. Numbers and hard data—that's how you get what you want and how you get your point across as a designer or creative."

"Sometimes a client wants something in a certain way and in a certain time frame that is not realistic, and we have to push them down a more realistic path so that everyone

is happy," says **Tim Jones**, vice president of Jones Lang Lasalle Brokerage, Inc., a commercial broker who operates on the real estate side of things. "Our culture is instant gratification, but we should be helping a client understand that faster almost never means better."

For someone like **Tyson Byers**, senior project manager at Andersen Construction, navigating this kind of interaction can be tricky, especially since as a contractor, he is expressing his expertise to both design teams and clients.

He says that when he begins expressing his outlook on the path of a project usually depends on when the client brings him, and other contractors, in. This sets the tone for the dynamics between designers and contractors. "I always prefer to be in as early as possible to assist with cost evaluation and to assist the designers," Byers says. "And there are moments for setting boundaries. I am always respectful, but sometimes I need to put my foot down if I am able to back up my opinion with hard data, if I see something as risky, or if I know the client won't be satisfied." At the end of the day, Byers explains, his name is also on the design, so it's in his best interest to make sure it works.

The bottom line is, designers and design professionals help people through the process of creating environments, which is no small or simple task. "We're working to solve problems, and we don't take that lightly," says Addington. As a designer, you can change people's lives and perspectives with the built environment and help them become happier, healthier, and more productive; this is achievable through strong collaboration, trust, learning from your elders, strategic planning, and creative vision.

Top left:
Doug Shaprio, lhd, IIDA, OFS

Bottom left:
Dallas Event

“WHAT’S YOUR JOB?”



Corporate Facilities Design Manager

“What makes my position unique is that while I represent client groups internally, I am also a client. I am involved in the entire design process, from locating real estate and project design, to signing construction projects and the eventual opening of the space.”

— Sarah Merriman, *Design Manager, Corporate Facilities, Starbucks*

Lighting Designer

“Working within a private practice, I work within a wide variety of project types, from healthcare to corporate to civic. In my role, my most direct collaborators are the end users. I have to figure out what they need in terms of lighting within a space and get a sense of how they will be moving through that space. Lighting designers have a lot of fun in our niche and we make time for creativity and experimentation.”

— CJ Brockway, *Principal, Sparklab Lighting Design*

Project Manager

“The way our sector is structured, I oversee design projects from start to finish, meaning I have the privilege of experiencing all stages of the project process, from establishing teams to budgeting and development. Still, I try not to influence too much because I like each member of a team to form real connections with the client and make their own creative decisions.”

— Jennifer King, *IIDA, Project Manager, DLR Group | Staffelbach*

Contractor

“Within any project, I am overseeing all elements of the construction and technical development. I like to come in as early as possible within the design process so that I can assist the designers with decision-making and with cost evaluation. It’s just as important for contractors to develop relationships with the clients as with the design teams.”

— Tyson Byers, *Senior Project Manager, Andersen Construction*

Principal / Interior Designer

“Multiple variables go into my role as a principal. I am involved in the programming and vision of the design and I am also trying to extrapolate the client’s vision. I’m used to working closely with contracts and developing strong relationships with clients, which are key to finding long term success in the field.”

— Brian Barnes, *Architect, Interior Designer, Principal, Entos Design*

Commercial Broker

“My position involves helping tenants find spaces for their projects and assisting as an advisor. As a broker, I am almost always on-site. This position has less desk time and more client visits, travel, and market evaluation. In commercial real-estate, deals are still pretty old-school: you have to know how to pitch, how to form and maintain relationships, and you have to be familiar with the ins and out of construction and design.”

— Tim Jones, *Vice President, Jones Lang Lasalle Brokerage, Inc.*

Director, Interiors Solutions

“My role revolves around the understanding of how spaces interact with clients and vice versa. One of the most interesting parts of my job and of being a designer is utilizing spatial knowledge to improve people’s lives. In my line of work, I touch design projects from start to finish, from overseeing branding and development to upholding client relationships and supervising project management.”

— Lisa Chill, *Director for Interiors Solutions, Jacobs*

Vice President of Sales

“In my position, there is a healthy mix of creativity and sales. On the creative side, I am often dealing with textures, fabrics, and materials. On the sales side, I am evaluating budgets and timelines and providing furniture solutions for my clients and their spaces. Through commercial furniture, I am helping bring a space to life.”

— Susan Stinnett, *VP Sales, Commercial Office Interiors*

What's Next?

Navigating the industry, networking, and managing expectations post-college.



The design industry is a complex system with constantly changing needs, goals, and priorities. It's important to lean on your network during job seeking or economic downturn.

“How do we as students form and maintain our relationships with the design leaders we meet at events like the Student Roundtable?”

- Katie Branning, Student IIDA

Don't be afraid to utilize social media and email to reach out with specific questions in mind. Design professionals like talking about their jobs, but they also enjoy talking to students about their interests and their futures, so don't feel like you are burdening anyone. If you don't hear back, maybe the interaction wasn't initiated at an opportune time. Make sure that your resume and list of skills are up to date so that you are prepared if and when you do hear back, and remember that you have something to offer, no matter what point you are at in your education or career.

Above from left to right:

Sarah Merriman, Starbucks; Susan Stinnett, Commercial Office Interiors; Molly Addington, IIDA, Gensler; Susana Covarrubias, IIDA, Gensler; CJ Brockway, IALD, MIES Sparklab Lighting Design; Tim Jones, Jones Lang Lasalle Brokerage, Inc.

Bottom right:

Chakyan So, Student IIDA, Bellevue College; Nathan Brown, Student IIDA, Bellevue College; Ashley Oliberos, Student IIDA, Bellevue College



KEY TAKEAWAYS

The experts agree: 50% of what they are looking for in a candidate is on their resume and 50% is you—your personality, your passion, and your drive. Asking strong questions, doing your research on a company or firm before applying, and being generally proactive says more about you than your immediate post-college experience.

FINDING THE JOB YOU WANT

Before putting yourself out there, remember to ask yourself if a firm or position is right for you—there won't always be an immediately clear sign, but the more you know about yourself, your capabilities, and your work style, the less daunting the job search will become. Being confident about what you want out of your career and the skills you have to offer will allow you to be selective in your applications and interviews, and to speak fluidly and effectively about why you are the ideal candidate for a job that you do want.

MEANINGFUL COLLABORATION

Collaboration is the bread and butter of any design project, and at any given time, there are multiple people with different roles working in tandem to achieve one collective goal: the creation of a designed space. As you move through your design career, you will be collaborating, communicating, and working alongside people from varied backgrounds in all kinds of roles. It's important to practice good collaboration etiquette in order to nurture and retain these relationships and emphasize mutual respect and overall trust. From project manager and lighting designers to associates and contractors—everyone brings something important to the table, and we all need each other in order to do our job correctly.

FORMING RELATIONSHIPS WITH CLIENTS

No matter who you are in the industry and where you are in your career, relationships are the backbone of the profession. Building and maintaining relationships will help you find success in your current role and provide you with opportunities for future jobs. The most important relationship you will maintain as a design professional is undoubtedly the one with your client. When presenting to a client, confidence and communication are key to a successful professional bond. The client wants to know what you and your team are capable of and how much you are willing to negotiate to achieve a successful end-result. Even if the client knows exactly what they want, they want to be assured that they can lean on you to meet their standards and goals and to go the extra mile when challenges inevitably arise.

MEASURING SUCCESS

As you begin your career in design, you will be learning on the job every day, so how you define personal and professional success today may not be the case tomorrow. You should be kind to yourself, recognize what you're capable of, and understand that wins on the job can be both small and large. Not every interview will lead to an offer, not every proposal will be a go-ahead, and not every client meeting will end in a long-term relationship, so it's important to stay true to your goals and not lose sight of yourself as a designer or design professional.

MANAGING EXPECTATIONS

Once you are on a design team, or managing a team of people, it is crucial to set goals and expectations early on in order to make sure everyone is collectively on the same page from the get-go. This will make it easier to communicate with clients on how you intend to go forward and what the end-results will be. While it's necessary to understand the client's goals, you must also recognize the talents and limitations of your team, and how they affect the process. Everyone has a different knowledge base that they bring to the table, and there is nothing wrong in saying to the client that something won't work or is unrealistic. "Communication is a vital skill within design and is a huge part of managing expectations for yourself and for your clients," says Tim Jackson. "You have to navigate client feelings and projects effectively and professionally."

*"What about people fresh out of college without much experience?"
asks Maddie Morgan, Student IIDA.*

IIDA

ABOUT IIDA

IIDA is the commercial interior design association with a global reach. We support design professionals, industry affiliates, educators, students, firms, and their clients through our network of 15,000+ members across 58 countries. We advocate for advancements in education, design excellence, legislation, leadership, accreditation, and community outreach to increase the value and understanding of interior design as a profession that enhances business value and positively impacts the health and well-being of people's lives every day. www.iida.org

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ABOUT OFS

OFS is a family owned, community driven company providing socially responsible furniture and logistics solutions in office, healthcare, education, government, and home office markets across the world. Established in 1937 in Huntingburg, Indiana, OFS has grown into a global leader while staying true to its local roots and core values of sustainability and craftsmanship. www.ofs.com

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