New book examines the future of US design education and how it will transform the design industries

By Steven Faerm

If you work in design and want your organization still to be around in five years, pay close attention to the students who are starting in college-level design programs now. They are radically different from previous generations, and when they enter the workforce in 3 to 5 years, their demands on employers are going to be significantly different. In order to both remain relevant and acquire top talent in the near future, organizations must assess these differences in student attributes, values, and ethics critically, and use that information to inform their strategic decision-making going forward.

Steven Faerm, | Author and Associate Professor of Fashion at Parsons School of Design

This strong assertion is based on quantitative data and critical analysis about the incoming student population for design higher education today that is the result of my years of conducting primary research into design students and what the future looks like for them. In my latest book, Introduction to Design Education: Theory, Research, and Practical Applications for Educators (Routledge, 2023), I present my heavily researched data on this generation of students, my analytical interpretations of that data – as they apply to both education and industry – and I include practical and useful tools and techniques for working with this generation.

It is imperative that design industry leaders review these findings, analysis, and tools, as all three will be useful to employers in the design industries. I've carefully and closely examined this up-and-coming generation, and in this book, I provide readers with invaluable actionable insights they can use to get ahead of the curve.

The incoming generation is so significantly different from previous ones that when they emerge from their education, they will be demanding employers who respect them, their creativity, and their skill sets. However, organizations must also not just say but *actually demonstrate* that they hold the same moral values as these emerging designers and have the same focus on the priorities they value most.

In order to begin developing appealing strategic initiatives to hire and retain top talent in this generation, design organizations need to have a comprehensive understanding of this generation of students. If you want to develop the best possible work environments for this generation, you must base your future planning on reliable data and critical analysis, such as what I have included in this book. Within this book, I present to you my findings about this student population, which, to the best of my knowledge, have not been presented to the professional design industries before.

This is the first post-pandemic generation to enter higher education. As a result of the isolation imposed through the pandemic, the experiences, priorities, values, and features of this student cohort are significantly different from previous ones. Because of the pandemic, these students experienced high school through Zoom, physically isolated and alone at home, rather than in a classroom with their peers. Because of the rapid advancements in and adoption of social media and other technologies, this generation socializes through text and gaming platforms more than ever before. They are less comfortable with eye-to-eye, face-to-face communications, largely because they were unable to engage in direct physical contact with their peers and develop these skills at a critical period of the development of their personalities and core identities during high school.

> *No longer is cutthroat competitiveness prioritized among students. Rather, empathy towards their peers, sensitivity to their feelings, and social consciousness are their priorities. They demand conscientiousness, environmental awareness, sustainability, and empathy from the world and everyone in it.*

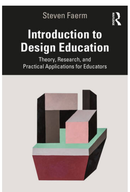
They believe that these values are sacrosanct, and should be universally observed and adopted. That means they need to be universally observed and adopted by design employers and educators alike.

This will lead to the demand for radical and perhaps exceptional changes to corporate culture in design, particularly focusing on the areas of widespread sustainability, accessibility of design, and the use of design to promote empathy amongst target consumers.

In order to avoid obsolescence, leaders in the design industry need to plan ahead now for five years in the future, in order to meet the needs and demands of the types of employees they will want. The resources, insights, and tools contained within my book can be used as a great resource for identifying the key characteristics of those up-and-coming employees/designers.

If design industries fail to leverage such information, they are very likely to fail to see the radical changes in the personality traits, orientation of priorities, interpersonal communication styles, and personal and professional goals for these future designers.

In this scenario, the best prognosis for these industries would be to say that they will have difficulty acquiring and retaining talent. A more realistic – albeit dour – prediction is that organizations within the design industries that fail to adapt their business models to the needs and demands of this generation will find themselves closing up shop, or having to be sold at the lowest price in the design equivalent of a fire sale.



The students of today are the designers of tomorrow. What is happening in design education will affect you, as a business leader. Within five years, there must be a radical shift to the values of Generation Z if the design industry has any hope of acquiring and retaining good talent within this field. The guidance provided in this book offers substantial advice on these and many other pressing matters the design industries face today and will face in the years ahead.

The publication is already being adopted by design schools around the world for faculty training – and it could benefit the industry in the same way, too. It is only by gaining this knowledge and preparing strategically that the future of design remains innovative, creative, and relevant.

INTRODUCTION TO DESIGN EDUCATION: Theory, Research, and Practical Applications for Educators | by Steven Faerm | 324 pp. | Routledge | $31.96

Steven Faerm is Associate Professor of Fashion at Parsons School of Design, where he has been teaching for over twenty years. His books *Fashion Design Course: Principals, Practices and Techniques* and *Creating a Successful Fashion Collection: Everything You Need to Develop a Great Line and Portfolio* are widely used in fashion programs worldwide, and he has received numerous international awards for his contributions to design education. www.Steven Faerm.com

Share

RELATED

Insights
JANE BIRKIN'S FASHION LEGACY

Insights
FASHION ON TOUR

Insights
KEY TAKEAWAY'S FROM THE LEST INDEX Q2 2023

Insights
BARBIECORE: WILL THE HYPE LASTI?

Insights
3 LESSONS FROM LOEWE'S REVIVAL

Insights
HOW FASHION COMPANIES CAN INVEST IN & CAPITALIZE ON AI

Insights
THE IMPRESSION'S TAKE ON THE FALL 2023 COUTURE SEASON

Interviews
BREACH MAGAZINE BRIDGES THE VANGUARD AND AVANT-GARDE

© 2023 The Impression LLC. All Rights Reserved