

DMI's FuturEd Program: Global Survey Timeline and Trends

Ask an in-house design leader, a consultant, or an educator what the future of design education should look like, and chances are you'll get three different answers. Thinking about the future of design education is a complex, multidimensional challenge. Do you think education should lead or follow practice? How should design relate to other disciplines, like business, engineering, or the arts? Should designers be educated for depth of specialist knowledge, general competence, or a combination of the two?

What's more is that these questions tend to be considered in isolation from each other in either practitioner or academic fora. In general, the academic conference world—quite rightly—showcases rigorous learnings from theory, practice, and research, while the world of professional conferences focuses on the live, hot-off-the-press concerns of design as it is practiced in society and in business.

DMI's FuturEd program exists to frame these questions and conversations by facilitating collective conversations about the future of design education with practitioners, educators, researchers, and students. As an organization at the nexus of these spheres, DMI is passionate about using its position to help collectively direct and redirect the agenda about the future of education for our profession.

A five-year thread

FuturEd was first initiated by DMI's late president Michael Westcott, who had a real passion for education. Back in 2013, in Chicago, he hosted a FuturEd summit with DMI members representing leading industry and academic partners to develop a shared vocabulary around design education, to map the current landscape of global programs around the world, and to develop early ideas on new curricula. Unfortunately, with Michael's passing in 2014, this work was interrupted. However, DMI picked up the conversation again in 2015 and initiated a series of symposia, debates, and workshops that continue to form a key thread throughout our conferences.

DMI FuturEd timeline

2013: FuturEd Summit, Chicago

Defining a shared vocabulary, a landscape of leading programs, and future curriculum ideas.



2015: Design Management Conference, Berlin

Discussing what designers need to learn to take on roles in policy development, startup incubation, and innovation culture change.



2015: Design Leadership Conference, Boston

Identifying the skills gaps of today's design managers, and imagining what design education in 2100 might look like.



2016: Design Management Conference, Amsterdam

Debating what design managers of the future looks like and how we might educate them.



2016: FuturEd survey launched

Understanding critical skills and mindsets, learning methods, and environments that will shape the future of design education.

2016: Academic Design Management Conference, Boston

Defining the critical skills and mindsets design students must acquire, and envisioning the design graduate of the future.



2017: Design Management Conference, Oslo

Debating how design education and industry should work together to shape the organization of the future.



Taking the global pulse

What are the critical skills and mindsets design students must acquire? What are the most effective teaching/learning methods for acquiring these skills/mindsets? What are the most effective learning environments for acquiring these skills/mindsets? Beginning in April 2016, DMI has facilitated a global online survey[<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/FuturED>] to understand academic, industry, and student perspectives on these key questions.

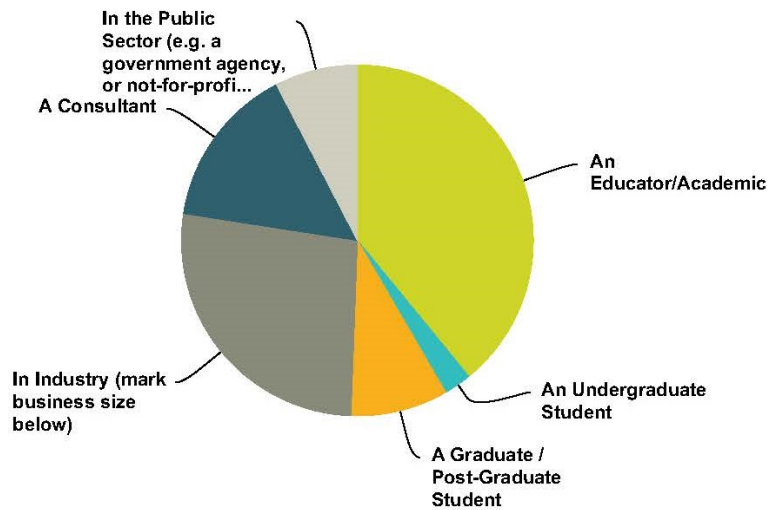


Figure 1: Breakdown of 670 survey respondents by occupation

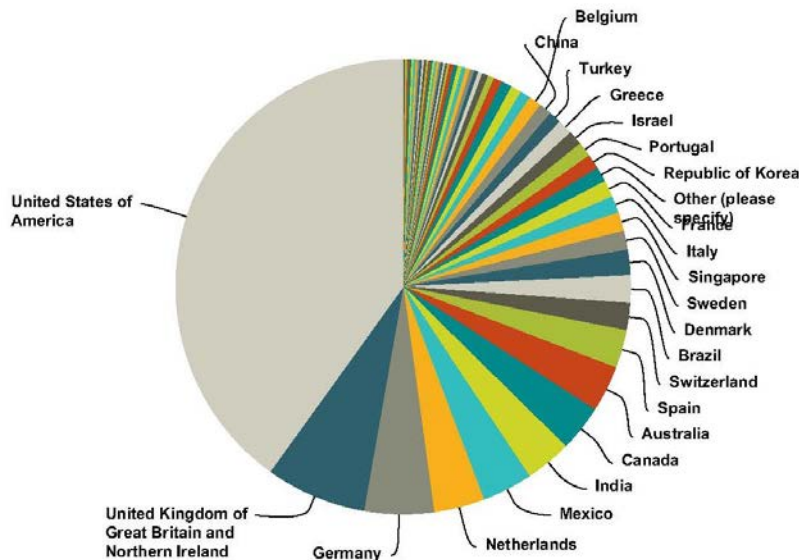


Figure 2: Breakdown of 670 survey respondents by location

With over 600 responses received from industry, academics, and students in more than 50 countries around the world, our survey has shown a clear appetite for discussing the future of design education globally and elicited strong opinions about the course it should chart in the years to come. Here is a sneak preview of the full results to come:

Imagination trumps making

When asked to rank the top “soft skills” designer graduates of the future should acquire through their education, *empathy*, *research*, *imagination*, and *collaboration* came out on top—ahead of the more traditionally oriented “maker mentality,” designers’ often-lauded talents for storytelling, and the powers of expression/persuasion so important to designers in business. However, digging beneath the headline numbers revealed some interesting undercurrents, with an emphasis on *making* still recognized as of critical importance to Chinese and South Korean respondents, and the ability to *collaborate* and work with others to integrate multiple perspectives and ideas seen as particularly important to those in industry. In contrast, the ability of designers of the future to envision something radically new and different though their imaginations is especially important to today’s educators, and to post-graduate students in particular.

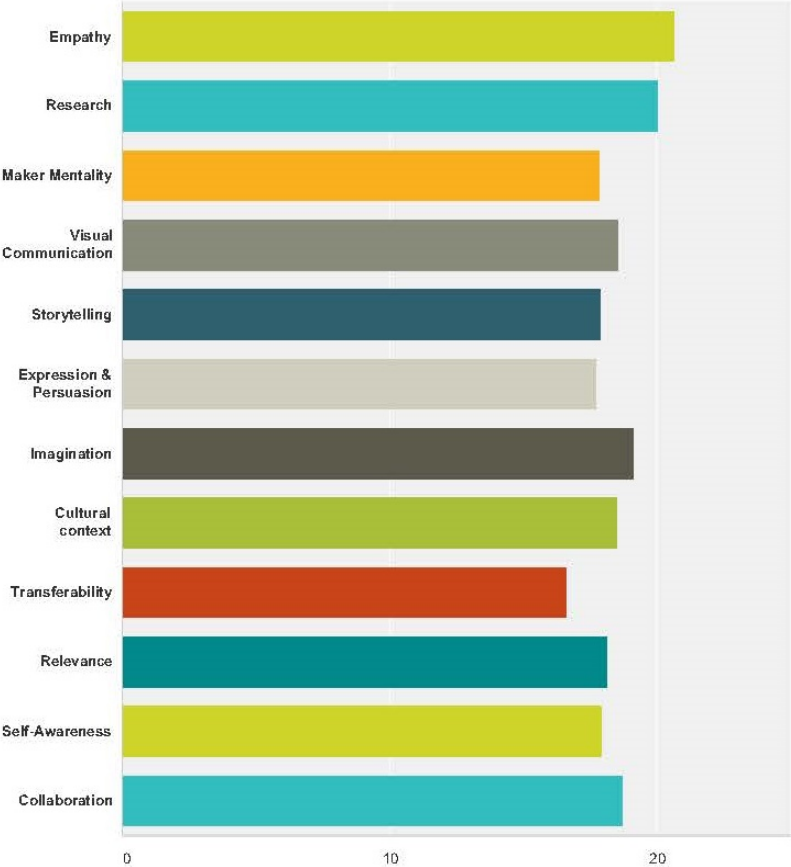


Figure 3: Ranking of ‘Soft Skills’ design students of the future should acquire (484 responses)

A curious business

The most important mindsets for design students of the future to think and perceive was judged not to be their business or entrepreneurial spirit, but rather their general curiosity—their ability to constantly grow their peripheral knowledge and look outside of their own experience. Interestingly, this held true regardless of whether in respondents answered from industry, academic, or student perspectives.

In general, the survey of mindsets revealed little geographic difference of opinion; however, the data did reveal particular regional concerns—for respondents in Asia, in particular. For example, the ability to embrace a “failure mindset” as part of a normal learning experience was seen as particularly important for Chinese design students; while in South Korea, the ability to embody an entrepreneurial spirit was seen as particularly important. Singaporean respondents expressed a desire that design students of the future embrace ambiguity and learn to consider more than one “right” answer, as well as demonstrating a greater grasp of business practices.

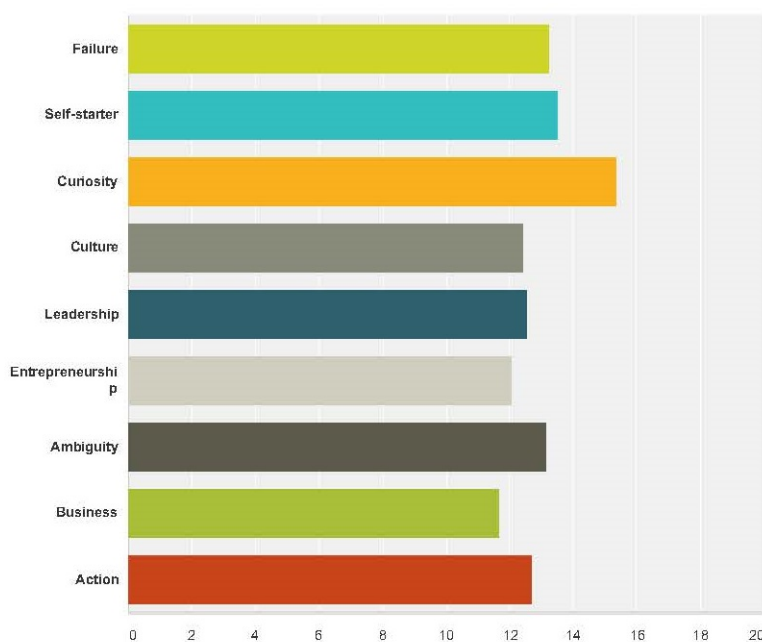


Figure 4: Ranking of ‘Mindsets’ design students of the future should acquire (447 responses)

Real-world learning

Although teaching methods vary by professor, school, discipline, course, and context, the DMI survey sought to understand from educator, student, and industry-leader perspectives how the key skills and mindsets identified in the survey could be acquired most effectively in future design education. The overwhelming consensus from academic, industry, and student views alike is that design education’s

practical, real-world orientation is what sets it apart; and that the dominant project-based, collaborative, peer-to-peer format of today's design education should be protected, advocated for, and enhanced.



Figure 5: Wordcloud of effective teaching/learning methods to acquire key skills and mindsets (429 responses)

Hybrid learning

Given unequal proximity to higher education as well as the escalating costs of post-secondary education, there has been much discussion about Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) and other forms of virtual and hybrid distance-learning environments. The DMI survey highlighted that the most effective learning environments of the future in which to learn the key soft skills and mindsets identified would be multiple forms of hybrid education: for example, digital/physical studio/classrooms, in-work learning, or integrated internship/university programs, all supported by productive face-to-face collaboration and supportive online content and interaction.



Figure 6: Wordcloud of effective learning environments to acquire key skills and mindsets (421 responses)

Take part in an ongoing conversation

To join in the FuturEd conversation about the future of design education, you can:

1. Take the FuturEd survey:
www.surveymonkey.com/r/FuturED
2. Attend the 2017 Design Leadership Conference in Minneapolis (Sept. 24-26, 2017).
3. Attend the 2018 DMI Academic Design Management in London (August 1-2, 2018).
4. Sponsor a DMI FuturEd event in your area. (Email: dmistaff@dmi.org)