THE METHOD OF DISCOURSE

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THE FIRST YEAR CORE PROGRAM, EVERY DESIGN STUDENT'S FIRST MAJOR HURDLE IN THEIR COLLEGE CAREER, WAS CREATED TO PROVIDE A LEVEL PLAYING FIELD FOR ALL PROSPECTIVE MAJORS.

It also allowed for students to work amongst one another, a rare occasion in the years following. Those with a variety of skills and interests can interact daily and even collaborate on projects, including the doorway. At that stage, I felt I was more a first-year design student than an architecture student. There was a sort of camaraderie when passing another on campus with portfolio and art box in hand. The long hours allowed me to get to know my classmates better and more quickly than other majors. Yet what the Core Program also did was create competition between pre-archs, as well an animosity between the groups of pre-majors (pre-arch vs. pre-graphic vs. pre-LA, etc). Every time I walked around studio, I was not only admiring classmates' work, but also sizing up my potential competition. I was relieved after seeing good work and hearing that they weren't applying for architecture in the spring. Ideas and concepts were kept secret until one was sure that they wouldn't be taken and executed in a better fashion. When in Core one felt they had to be the most original, the smartest, and the best.

In the Core Program, there was also an unspoken idea — at least among the pre-archs — that Architecture was THE program to apply for and the most difficult to get in to. It has consistently been chosen most often as a first choice for potential applicants since Core began in the 2004-05 academic year. I lived in the Design Learning Community, and a majority of my floor mates started out as pre-architecture majors, but the numbers began to dwindle before the first semester had ended. Within the first few weeks, I realized how vast the pre-architecture population really was. Architecture became a goal, an accomplishment, as opposed to an actual major or future career. I can truthfully say that in my first year, I made little to no effort to find out what architecture was, who contemporary architects were, or how the design principles I was learning at the time could be applied to architecture. My view of architecture was about as basic as it came.

In second year, I started out with essentially a blank slate: we had some of the basic tools (drawing/rendering/collage/prototyping skills, basic design principles), but very little knowledge of architecture as a profession or way of thinking. The feeling of competition was still strong in my mind as the semester began, but slowly went away as I started to get to know those in my studio. When it came time to design my own buildings, I was stuck in shape-making mode. SketchUp models became abundant, and I had hoped a concept would magically arise from one. It was around this time that I attended a meeting for the student journal of architecture, called *CORE* at the time, now called *Datum*. That particular meeting happened to be one that covered a wide range of topics: the quality of our instructors, the Iowa State architecture program as a whole, and the accreditation process, among others. This discussion, which took place in early November, shook the notion I had that architecture

— both the program and the profession — were the greatest things out there. Is architecture becoming obsolete? Should students have to confront more obstacles than the Core Program?

This discussion, along with future ones, completely questioned my faith in the architecture program. I began to speak up more in class, tried to learn more about architecture outside of class, and challenged myself to produce better work. My initial mentality in the architecture program was a superficial one, not uncommon among beginning students: shape-making. The idea of shape-making may very well come from the popularity of "starchitects" such as Gehry and Hadid. It is a mentality that was shattered by discussions as a studio class, but more

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importantly from weekly *Datum* meetings. Simply having the opportunity to talk with older students (an unfortunate rarity in my experience), as well as the occasional professor outside of the classroom has been invaluable. The new perspectives and wisdom of others has continually energized me and seeing students that are still passionate as upperclassmen is reassuring. One of the most important lessons I've taken away from *Datum* is to take an active part in your education, otherwise the long hours and other obstacles will catch up to you. I've learned to avoid just scraping by in studio and other classes. I've avoided doing yet not understanding so that I won't end up drafting toilet fixtures for the rest of my days. ◢