

**“To: Students, Love, ID:
Opportunities for curriculum mass communication at the Institute of Design”
Research report**

In 2016, the Institute of Design (ID) underwent several major changes: it moved campus, said farewell to its Dean of 30 years, Patrick Whitney, and selected a new Dean, Denis Weil. This moment of great institutional change at ID presented us an opportunity to gather a body of knowledge about the diverse student experiences at ID and communicate it to ID's new leadership via a poster, with supporting information contained in this report.

Section I. Our approach

Our research goal was to create a body of knowledge about diverse student experiences to present to ID leadership. Our goal was to represent a multiplicity voices by researching different kinds of students: domestic and international, across different degree programs (MDes, Foundation, English foundation, MDM, MBA dual degree).

For the time-based Journey Map portion of the research assignment, we narrowed our research focus to the first semester curriculum experience for MDM students.

We used **convenience sampling** by recruiting fellow students who were available and on-campus. We approached students in the studio, **DIY** style. We requested to interview them for a class project.

We relied on **intrinsic rewards** for our subjects of being heard, and the **good will** of contributing to the future of the Institute of Design. Participants also expressed the intrinsic reward of increased self-awareness through introspection.

We interviewed 9 students. We recruited for a sample of students representing diversity across **degree program, nationality, professional background, gender, and age** (in order of consideration). We interviewed only currently-enrolled students. We did not interview PhD students.

Recruitment Screener Script

Hello, we are Yanyan, Maho and Becky. We are seeking current ID students and ID alumni to interview for our class project for Introduction to Observing Users.

The goal of our project is to collect insights from students to share with the new dean. We would like to schedule an hour-long interview with you in the 6th floor studio of 565 W Adams Street. Having a conversation with you can help us better understand your experience and improve the school in the future.

Your participation will be anonymous.

If you are interested in participating, please answer some questions to let us know who you are as an ID student.

1. Are you a domestic or international student?
If international, where are you from?
2. What is your degree program in ID?
3. How long have you been at ID?
4. What was your professional background before coming to ID?

Research Protocol

Interviews will be conducted by Institute of Design students Maho Kohga, Shangyanyan “Yanyan” Li, and Becky Marshall. The interviews will take place at IIT’s downtown campus at 565 West Adams Street in Chicago, Illinois, on the 6th floor student studio space. The interviews will last for about one hour. The interviews will be **expert interviews** about the subject’s experience as an ID student. The process will be recorded using voice-recorders, cameras (photography) and written notes.

We will also use card-sorts as **cultural probes**: “About me,” and “Design schools,” and “Events”:

“About me” presents one card in the center of the table that says “ME.” The student is given a stack of cards with many types of content: design disciplines, design skills, job titles and career paths, etc, all related to design. We also provide blank cards and markers for the subject to write a new card that is important and missing from our deck (for example, one student wrote “business,” which we had left out. Other students then used this subject-created card afterward). The student is meant to arrange the cards around the “ME” card to inspire sharing about the way they understand themselves as a student, and their goals for their time at the Institute of Design.

“Design schools” is a stack of cards with institutions of learning. The deck of cards includes schools that range from very similar to ID, to very different from ID. Some schools are not design schools, but MBA or Engineering schools. We also provide blank cards and markers for the student to write a new card that is important and missing from our deck. The student is meant to arrange the cards in a way that is meaningful to them-- many sorted into piles for “places I applied to,” “I was rejected from these schools,” “I was accepted at these schools,” “I researched these schools,” “I’ve never heard of these schools,” etc. This was meant to inspire the students to communicate how they understand ID’s position in its competitive landscape, and what information made the student choose ID over other options.

“Events” is a stack of cards with different extracurricular events in the ID community: social events, recruiting events, public lectures, etc. The intent was for students to arrange them to inspire sharing of what kinds of events are important or valuable to them, and what kind of events the student wants to see more of.

Interview questions

Please introduce yourself.

**Card sort: "About me"*

- How would you describe your dream for yourself as a designer?

How does your experience at ID so far compare and contrast to your expectations before you came?

- How did you respond to this?

How do you choose classes?

- What do you feel makes a class valuable for you? Examples?
- If you could ask for any class to be offered, what would it be?
- How do the credit hour minimums and maximums affect your education? (13.5 - 18 hours)

What ID events have you attended outside of class?

- Tell me about your experience?

ID's reputation is...

- (In USA, or in past country)
- How is ID different from other design schools?
- Did you consider other design schools besides ID? Did you consider other degrees?
- **Card sort: "Design schools"*

I chose ID because...

- ID's strengths are...
- ID's weaknesses are....

How do you interact with the alumni network, or how could you?

How does ID support you as a (MDes, Foundation, Dual degree, MDM, Ph D, International) student?

- Is there some way you could be better supported as a (MDes, Foundation, Dual degree, MDM, Ph D, International) student?

What would be important to you in a new campus if we move to main campus?
Why?

Complete this sentence: ID's future should be...

May we observe you registering for spring classes?

Anything else?

Second interview: First semester experience

For the time-based **Compelling Experiences journey map** portion of our research (see appendix), we narrowed our focus to the MDM academic experience of the first semester.

We're interviewing you about your first semester experience at ID. This is part of a project about student experience for Introduction to Observing Users. We will present our final project to the new dean & faculty. Your responses will be anonymous.

Please introduce yourself

** Card sort: About me*

How do you learn about ID?

Why did you choose to come to ID?

** Card sort: Design schools*

How did you plan your first semester?

- What specific resources did you use? (website, friends, faculty, course overview, alumni, course schedule)

How do you think you could have planned better?

How are you planning your next semester?

- What specific resources will you use? (What specific resources did you use? (website, friends, faculty, course overview, alumni, course schedule)
- How will this help you achieve your long-term goals?

We then applied the content from our MDM interviews to a **Journey Map using the "5 Es" framework** (entice, enter, engage, exit, extend). Refer to the appendix for this journey map.

Section II. Findings

Themes about Students

- Students have different understandings of what institutions are ID's peers and competitors
- Students come to ID to change career vs. augment career
- Students value the diversity of professional and cultural backgrounds from fellow students
- There is tension between 2nd year students and 1st semester students in workshops

Themes about Academics

- Confusion about class names, content and objectives
- Frustration with required courses vs "classes I want to take"
- Confusion about how classes relate to each other: sequential order, prerequisites
- Confusion about credit hours and time expectations
- Difficulty choosing classes because of lack of understanding and clarity
- Academic critiques were shared across degree programs
- Students value learning from fellow students
- Students want professional development programming: portfolio review, website coaching

Themes about ID

- Students expressed gaps between what they expected ID courses to be like and what they are
- Students desire more student work to be shown on the school website
- Students want support learning specific skills
- Students think ID's alumni network is strong, but they don't know how to access it

Insights

In making choices about their education, students felt most supported by one-to-one advisor-type relationships, through faculty advisors but also through older students and staff. Students expressed lack of support from mass communication channels such as course descriptions, course schedule, information on prerequisites, etc. Students expressed confusion and frustration on the topics of time expectations, work expectations, outcome expectations, prerequisites vs. recommended previous courses, and so on.

Students felt time was wasted during mandatory Orientation Week. Students were eager to begin learning during Orientation Week.

Principles and Solutions

Clear one-to-many communication of curriculum structure, how classes relate to each other, and course expectations.

Proposed solutions:

1. Diagrammed communication of course types and relationships to aid in academic exploration and understanding of course overlaps, updated each semester
2. Diagrammed communication of sequential parts of curriculum and key prerequisites, updated each semester
3. Standardized syllabus for each class from faculty, communicating course information, time expectations, deliverables and outcomes, and prerequisite knowledge

Orientation Week time as an opportunity for educational “front-loading.”

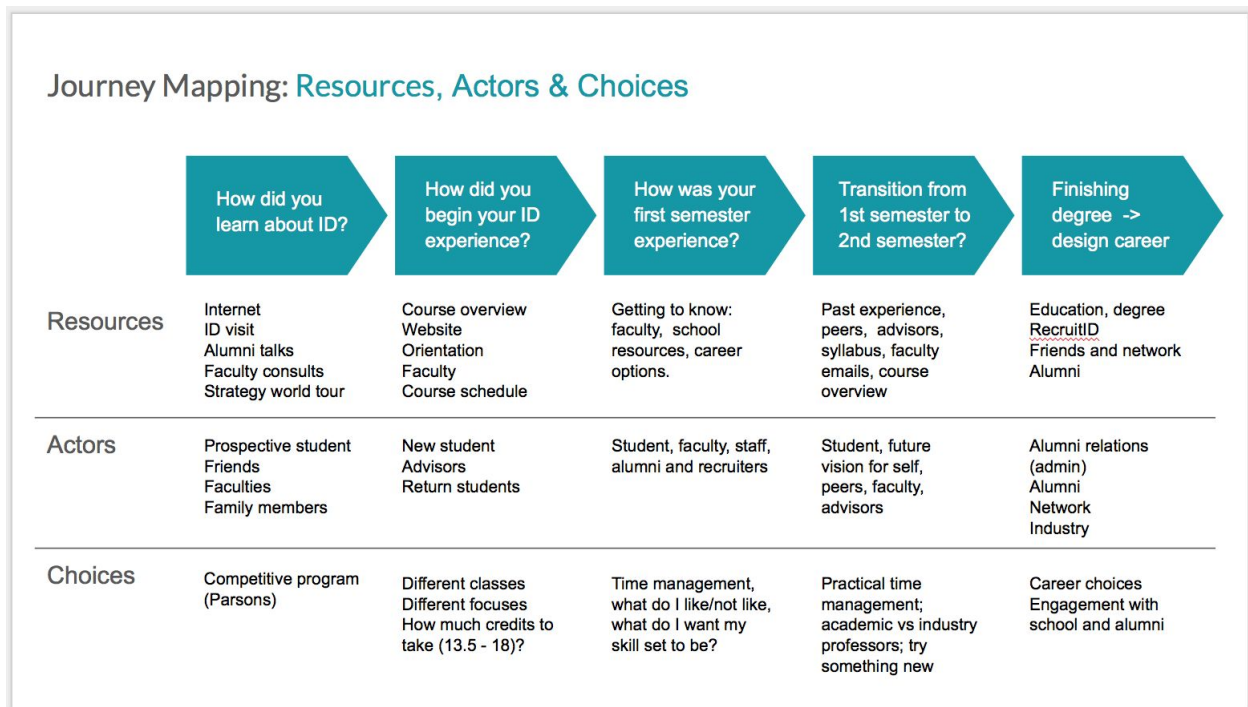
Proposed solutions:

1. Design bootcamp: Faculty teach surveys of key topics and skill-building both to familiarize students with design culture, and to prepare students for success in classes.

Appendix

Compelling experience map (5 slides):

The First semester experience for MDM students



Journey Mapping: Now

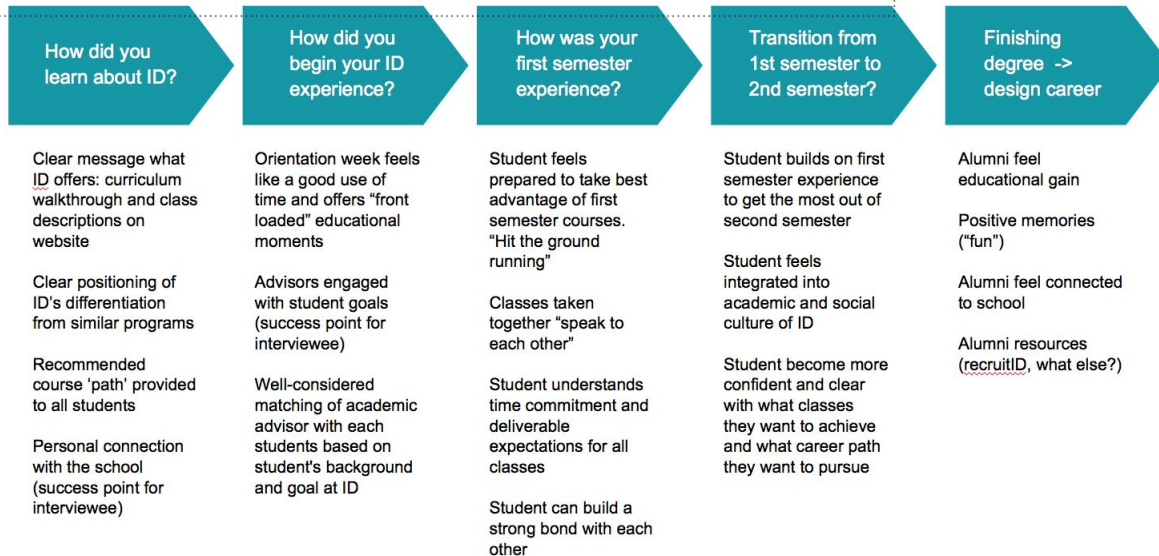
	How did you learn about ID?	How did you begin your ID experience?	How was your first semester experience?	Transition from 1st semester to 2nd semester?	Finishing degree -> design career
Activities	What is design? Meeting ID people in person Search info online	Set up a study plan to cover as much as possible + cover what's important	Coursework Getting to know school	Registering for classes Synthesizing 1st semester experience	Career planning and decision making Self brand building
Anxieties	Personal moving Family Finance Time constraints	Not sure what the courses are about Don't know the time commitment	Time management Is this a good investment	Getting ready to leave ID (career future)	Career anxiety How to communicate ID to outsiders
Ambitions	Broadening skills for entrepreneurial business Learn new skills	Learn what's valuable Career ambition	To get the most out of time at ID	Get the most out of the rest of your time-- half over!	Career ambition Ambition to continue the good name of ID
Attitudes	Value education Personal interests Sabbatical	Learn things outside of the comfort zone	Time poor Optimistic	Critique of school More confident Regard for 1st semester	

Appendix (cont.)

Journey Mapping: Pain Points

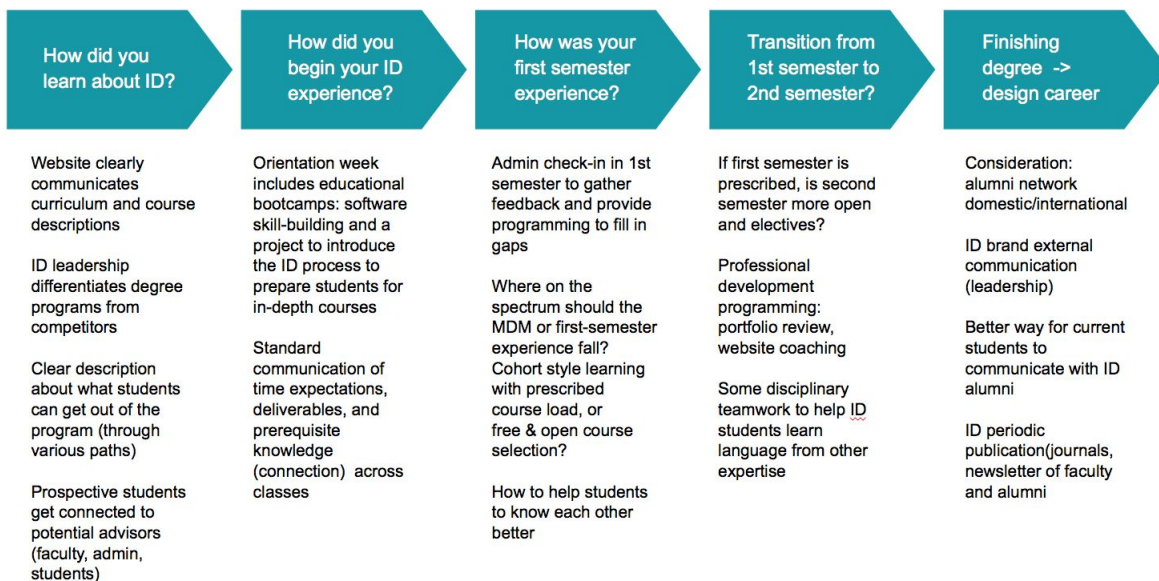
How did you learn about ID?	How did you begin your ID experience?	How was your first semester experience?	Transition from 1st semester to 2nd semester?	Finishing degree -> design career
<p>Not clear what ID's program is teaching</p> <p>Not sure the differences between ID and other design programs and even MBA program, etc</p> <p>Some MDM students were given a recommended course list and warned away from certain classes, other students did not or don't recall learning this</p>	<p>Lack of clarity between class title and content</p> <p>Don't have an overview of the whole curriculum, and connection between each classes</p> <p>Orientation felt like lost time despite being mandatory</p> <p>Lack of knowledge about "design" "What is design?"</p>	<p>Ordering of classes, prerequisites</p> <p>Unclear expectations of credit hours vs. time spent for classes</p> <p>Can't build satisfying relationship with peers</p> <p>Class sizes for required courses</p> <p>Lack of knowledge about "ID methods" lack of 'common language' especially in workshop classes</p>	<p>Limited time to make the most of (urgency)</p> <p>Looking forward to moving on (focus shifts to outside of school)</p> <p>Required courses are sometimes perceived as a burden</p>	<p>Lack common ground when working in a cross-disciplinary team with other expertise</p> <p>(We would have to interview graduated students to gain more insights)</p>

Journey Mapping: Opportunities



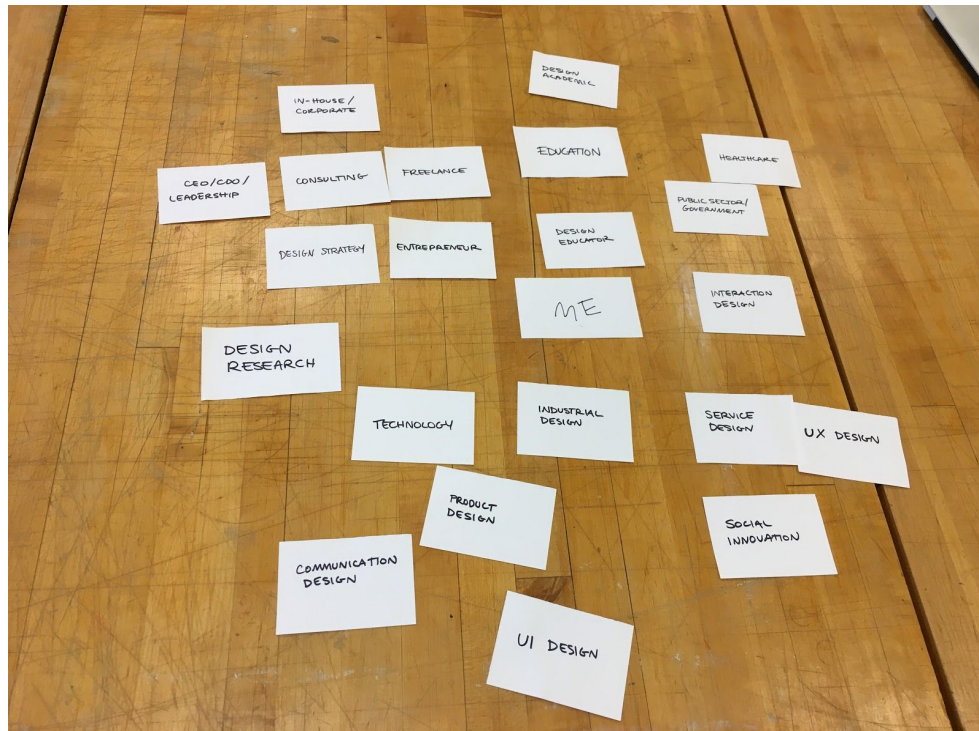
Appendix (cont.)

Journey Mapping: Future Compelling Experiences



Appendix (cont.)

Card sort: "About me"



Card sort: "Design schools"

