



# Northampton Community College

Interior Design Degree and Specialized Diploma

Independent Academic Audit

2017-2024

Prepared By: Sophia Le

Junior Interior Designer, SFCS Architects

4124 Bunker Hill Dr S.

Coopersburg PA, 18036

484-546-1725

Auditor's Experience:

Associate of Science in Interior Design, Northampton Community College

2017-2019

Bachelor of Arts in Interior Design, Moore College of Art & Design

2019-2021

## **I. Introduction**

This audit review was held on April 11th, 2024 at Northampton Community College with Dan Ebner, Assistant Professor of the Architecture Department and the following information was provided for review:

1. Current Curriculum
2. Tour of studios and classrooms including technology review and presentation of student work

## **II. Purpose**

Northampton Community College's Interior Design Associate in Applied Sciences (A.A.S.) degree and Specialized Diploma continues its goal to support two student demands: A degree that enables students to enter immediately into the workplace upon graduation, and competitive degree that allows students to transfer to four year CIDA-accredited colleges and universities in an effort to receive a Bachelor's Degree in Interior Design.

The interior design program has increased to 25% enrollment and classes are between 20-25 students. There is an increased demand for advancing from a two year associate degree program to a four year program. Students are choosing to transfer coursework and continue their education at CIDA-accredited schools. In addition to the Applied Sciences Degree, the Specialized Diploma in Kitchen and Bath Design is provided to develop specialized skills in residential kitchen and bath with large retailers such as Home Depot and Lowes.

The Interior Design Program has helped recent graduates secure positions in the design industry with employers such as Fox Chase Woodworks & Restorations, Gail Gray Home, Ebert Furniture Gallery, and Penn Contractors. Notably, graduates of the program have successfully transferred to highly reputable 4-year schools, including Marywood University, New York University, Moore College of Art and Design, Thomas Jefferson University, Savannah College of Art and Design, and several others. Moreover, the program has consistently grown over the past several years despite the challenges faced by the interior design industry as a whole. For example, a 4% decline in interior designers is expected between now and 2029; however, the program's enrollment continues to increase. The resilience of Northampton Community College's Interior Design Program is largely owed to the purposeful leadership provided by Dan Ebner, as well as the expertise provided by adjunct faculty. The overall value of the education provided by NCC is difficult to overstate.

### III. Program Overview

The foundational interior design knowledge and applications provided by the Interior Design Program positions students to succeed in a variety of settings, including Residential Design, Kitchen and Bath Design, and the diverse sector of Commercial Design. Northampton Community College offers a comprehensive and dynamic curriculum designed to prepare aspiring interior designers for success in a rapidly evolving field. Courses integrate creativity, technical skills, and critical thinking to solve real-world design challenges.

During the first year of interior design studies, coursework is integrated with an architectural program that builds knowledge of fundamental design principles, hand sketching, and model building. Students also build their knowledge of scale, comprehending color concepts, design research, history, materials, communication skills including verbal discussing of ideas, and visual preparation of floor plans, wall elevations/sections, perspective drawings, and basic proficiency in both hand sketching as well as computer production. Students present their work to fellow classmates as well as professors and guest judges to refine presentation skills. By the end of year two, students have the opportunity to present directly to clients.

During the second year, interior design students continue to take studio, history, and material classes that are applied to Residential and Commercial design work. The residential design class provides students with the chance to visit a residential project site, measure a room's existing conditions, and interview clients about their needs. Students then create a presentation, floorplan, 3D renderings, and digital finish boards to present to the client and class. During the Commercial Design classes, students are tasked with projects that focus on community sites that lay out a comprehensive program, scope, and real world challenges that students collaboratively problem-solve and prepare creative interior solutions. For example, students must follow a budget and create budget sheets to meet cost during the design of one of their projects.

Computer program classes are taught in room 208 that teaches programs such as Sketchup, Revit, Enscape, Photoshop, Canva, Powerpoint, and Excel. Students develop their projects through hand sketches of floor plans and perspectives, and they apply their designs to the aforementioned computer programs. As projects develop, instructors are present at each step of the way by visiting individual students in order to provide feedback on scale, space, color, space planning, materials, and sustainability. Students are able to creatively problem-solve by developing beautiful spaces that meet the health, wellness, and safety needs of its users. Students often work together in classrooms and between each class. Each year, students develop a tutoring schedule overseen by an adjunct professor that provides help to students on programs, collaboration, and grows a sense of community. Lastly, students are provided an extensive material library and equipment to develop their interior design projects and models.

#### **IV. Key Program Strengths**

The enthusiasm shared by students and faculty of this program was apparent throughout the process of this audit. For example, I briefly met with a current student of the program, and I couldn't help but feel inspired myself with the care, knowledge, and attention to detail expressed during our brief interaction. I was impressed by her application of sustainable materials, design language, and presentation skills. She successfully problem solved, created budgets, and crafted beautiful 3D renderings that spoke to the quality of work of the interior design program as a whole.

The real-world inspired projects and computer programs provided throughout this program maintains the industry relevance and value of an education at Northampton Community College. Furthermore, the study abroad and experiential learning opportunities serve as a source of inspiration and valuable education to current students. Recent study abroad opportunities include Italy, France, and Spain. Interior Design and Architecture students are encouraged to pursue these opportunities to expose them to real world architecture. Very few community colleges provide such opportunities to their students, and it is through such experiences that the next generation of designers learn to shape the industry.

Students are also encouraged to pursue internship and leadership opportunities that build relevant experience to be an interior designer. Dan Ebner is the faculty advisor of the American Society of Interior Designers (ASID). Students gain leadership opportunities and industry knowledge by arranging guest lectures from design professionals, taking field trips, fundraising, and learning the industry landscape. In the past, they've participated in architectural tours in Washington DC to visit Gensler, one of the leading architectural, interior, and engineering firms in the world. Additional architectural tours included Chicago, New York City, and various other cities that closely ties the curriculum studies of architecture.

The greatest strength of this program, however, is found within the leadership provided by Dan Ebner and faculty. For example, Dan prioritizes the needs of students by serving as an advisor for Interior Design students seeking transfer opportunities and employment opportunities. Additionally, Dan ensures that all students are given adequate time and attention in the educational process through meetings during office hours, open tutoring sessions provided by an instructor, and responsiveness to student feedback.

## **V. Opportunities for Improvement**

The primary areas of opportunity include 1) facilities and technology, and 2) faculty. For example, the Interior Design program has consistently grown over the past several years, but the current facilities are unable to accommodate the larger number of students. Students are challenged in completing assignments due to classes being held in the same classrooms with the only computers available to the Interior Design program. Additionally, the current desk space within the classrooms (such as Room 204) simply cannot accommodate the number of students within the Interior Design program. The program has recently utilized additional space whenever possible, including the Kiva for final critiques. Nevertheless, even the use of such additional space is inadequate for the current demand of the program.

Another key opportunity for improvement includes the establishment of a dedicated workshop. Use of power tools, general tools, and associated materials are essential for building project models. The tools are currently located in room 208 because there is no other space for storage. The use of these tools in close proximity to computers can be risky to the desktops, and students using these tools can easily have an accident happen in cases they may not be carefully attentive. In order to accommodate the growing enrollment and demand of an Interior Design education at Northampton Community College, the program simply needs more space for dedicated work areas, classrooms, and presentation rooms. The program's overall reputability and relevance is evidenced by the growing enrollment, as well as enhanced interest shown by partner institutions in establishing transfer agreements with the program.

Several additional computers (i.e., at least 20) are needed to accommodate the program's growth, and this will require purchase of the most up-to-date software (e.g., Revit). The use of updated programs allows graduates of this program to stay competitive in the job market and transfer college opportunities. For example, graduates that are proficient in programs such as Revit possess a significant advantage in the current hiring market and benefit them with transfer schools.

Finally, the Interior Design Program would significantly benefit by hiring additional full-time faculty. As of right now, Dan Ebner is the only full-time faculty member. His leadership and expertise has been instrumental in the success of the Interior Design Program; however, the long-term viability of this program cannot be sustained with a single full-time faculty member. As the program continues to evolve, additional full-time faculty will be needed to accommodate the growing number of students and associated time commitments. Furthermore, the stability of the program will be heavily dependent upon the diversity of faculty resources available, including subject matter expertise, industry networking, and overall bandwidth.

## VI. Conclusions

This audit review conducted at Northampton Community College provided valuable insights into the Interior Design Program's strengths, opportunities, and areas for improvement. The program has demonstrated remarkable success in fulfilling its objectives of preparing students for seamless transitions to CIDA-accredited four-year institutions and entry into the job market. With a growing enrollment rate and students transferring to esteemed universities, it's evident that the program's curriculum and leadership have played pivotal roles in its success.

However, there are clear opportunities for improvement, particularly in terms of facilities, technology, and faculty resources. The program's expansion has outpaced the capacity of its current facilities, necessitating additional space for classrooms, workshops, and technology. Updated technology and software is essential to ensure students remain successful in their current studio classes, as well as to remain competitive in the industry and transfer opportunities. Furthermore, while the leadership provided by Dan Ebner has been invaluable, the program would benefit from the addition of more full-time faculty members to support its growing student body and evolving needs.

The Interior Design Program at Northampton Community College has achieved significant milestones and garnered praise for its quality education. Strategic investments in facilities, technology, and faculty are essential to sustain its momentum and ensure continued excellence in the future.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sophia Le". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Sophia Le

06/10/2024