

Twenty-First Century Design Scholarship

Nuts + Bolts / AIGA Design Educators Community Conference

Profession Track / Roundtable discussion

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Scholarship is a tricky thing for design academics, especially for junior faculty who are trying to build a body of work towards tenure. To stay relevant in a quickly changing field, we often fluctuate between creative practice and more traditional scholarly pursuits, all while attempting to build a cohesive dossier. At the same time, we work in an especially turbulent environment. Our institutions are under increasing pressure to define their worth and, in turn, are heightening their expectations around scholarship. The field is trying to distinguish itself (or not) from fine art, architecture, and others, muddying our dissemination outlets. Digital media is facilitating new and unproven outlets for publication. And, increasingly, the validity of our creative practice as a form of scholarship is under constant scrutiny.

On top of this, we often enter academia under-prepared for the reality of serious scholarship and have to figure out what good work looks like as we go. Unlike other fields, the scholarship—and most importantly the writing—we do as graduate students does not necessarily prepare us for work as a professional academic. These factors all add up to cause many new design academics to struggle as they attempt to build a sound body of work.

Luckily, we are not alone in this struggle. Our community of educators are all trying to answer the same question: what is good design scholarship in the Twenty-First Century? This roundtable will attempt to answer this question by bringing together academics with various levels of experience and from a diverse set of institutions. By opening conversation through the roundtable format, we can start to uncover the range of scholarship that is currently being done, how faculty are framing their work in dossier narratives, and how different types of work are being received by T&P committees. Each of our institutions will have its own set of standards and criteria but this discussion will start a dialog about our work that can help us all move forward as a community. One outcome of the conversation will be a plan to start an online community (via LinkedIn or a similar service) where design academics can continue the conversation about scholarship and post questions as they arise.