

Research Note

A COMPARISON OF COMPETENCY REQUIREMENTS FOR HOUSING AND INTERIOR DESIGN PROFESSIONALS

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Introduction and Purpose

The trend in university curricula is toward a reduction in the Housing major, and a parallel increased focus on Interior Design. As this educational shift takes place, it is important to determine whether those students intending to seek employment in the housing industry can benefit from the interior design curriculum. The specific objective of this study is to determine whether any overlap exists in the competencies needed by professionals in housing, and by professionals in interior design.

Review of Literature

A review of literature found no previous studies that specifically compare competencies needed by professionals in housing and interior design. However, two related investigations were found in recent literature. Harwood (1991) conducted a comparison of educational standards in the interior design and architecture professions, while Hines, Albanese, and Garrison (1994) compared competencies of residential and non-residential designers.

Methodology

Accreditation guidelines of the Foundation for Interior Design Education Research (FIDER) are used as the standard by which interior design knowledge and skills are measured (FIDER, 1991). A questionnaire was developed by the author based on selected FIDER competencies. Using a four-point Likert scale, respondents were asked to indicate the level of competency required for a person in their professional position for 21 FIDER knowledge/skills areas. Scores ranged from 0 (not required) to 3 (com-

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petent). Demographic and open-ended questions were also included in the questionnaire.

Study respondents included housing professionals in five major cities in a mid-western state. Real estate agents, mortgage lenders, new home marketers, property managers, leasing agents, and directors of government housing comprised the professions represented in the study. Business listings randomly selected from telephone directories in these five cities resulted in 210 potential respondents.

Using Dillman's *Total Design Method* (1978), one mailing of the questionnaire was sent to potential respondents, followed by a reminder postcard. Seventy-six housing professionals responded to the questionnaire, a 36 percent return rate.

Mean scores on each of the 21 FIDER knowledge/skill areas were calculated for the six categories of housing professions represented, and compared to the FIDER standards. Demographic data were tabulated as frequencies, percentages, and means. Open-ended questions were reviewed for common themes in the text.

Findings

Results of the demographic query indicate that real estate agents (23) and apartment managers (20) were better represented in the study than the other housing professions (public housing directors, 5; new home marketers, 9; leasing agents, 10; mortgage lenders, 9). The majority of the respondents were male (65%). Respondents reported having been in their profession for an average of 13 years. Fewer than half were college graduates (36%), but the majority had received some college or technical training (57%).

Results of this investigation indicate that in some cases FIDER standards require a higher level of professional competencies than are necessary for those in the housing industry. On the other hand, findings suggest that in some cases FIDER standards are lower than the competency levels needed by housing professionals.

Basic Interior Design

As shown in Table 1, FIDER standards for *human factors* (3.00) are higher than needed by all housing professionals. Average competency levels required for housing professionals range from $x=1.45$ for Mortgage Lenders to $x=2.33$ for Directors of Public Housing. However, the FIDER standard for *design for special concerns* (1.00) is lower than that for all housing professions.

Residential Design

Six knowledge/skill areas were evaluated under the heading of Residential Design. FIDER standards are higher than the requirements for all housing professions in *design process, space planning, furniture selection/layout, and design attributes* (3.00). Clearly, housing professionals see little need for understanding the arrangement and manipulation of interior spaces. The FIDER standards for *special populations* (2.00) is lower than that needed by all housing professionals. However, housing professionals are very close to agreeing with the FIDER standard for *special purposes* (2.00).

Table 1. Comparison of Competency Requirements: Basic Interior Design

Knowledge/ Skill Area	FIDER Standards	Apt. Manager (n=20)	Dir. Public Housing (n=5)	New Home Marketer (n=9)	RE Agent (n=23)	Leasing Agent (n=10)	Mortgage Lender (n=9)
Human factors	3.00	1.93	2.33	1.86	1.73	1.50	1.45
Design for special concerns	1.00	2.00	2.33	1.80	1.88	2.00	1.91

Note: Average Competency Levels Required: 0=none; 1=awareness; 2=understanding; 3=competent

Table 2. Comparison of Competency Requirements: Residential Design

Knowledge/ Skill Area	FIDER Standards	Apt. Manager (n=20)	Dir. Public Housing (n=5)	New Home Marketer (n=9)	RE Agent (n=23)	Leasing Agent (n=10)	Mortgage Lender (n=9)
Design process	3.00	1.86	1.33	2.13	1.62	1.00	1.36
Space planning	3.00	2.00	2.00	2.13	1.62	1.00	1.00
Furniture selection and layout	3.00	1.57	1.00	1.53	1.46	2.00	0.90
Special populations	2.00	2.40	3.00	2.13	2.19	2.50	2.27
Special purposes	2.00	2.00	2.00	1.60	1.96	1.50	1.36
Design attributes	3.00	2.00	1.33	2.13	1.46	1.50	0.90

Note: Average Competency Level Required: 0=none; 1=awareness; 2=understanding; 3=competent

Technical

As shown in Table 3, some of the Technical knowledge/skill area requirements are similar for both the interior design and the housing professions. With the exception of New Home Marketers and Leasing Agents, other housing professionals have similar needs in the area of *structure and construction* when compared with FIDER standards (2.00). Except for Real Estate Agents, other housing professionals have similar requirements to FIDER for *building systems* (2.00). When compared to FIDER standards for *energy conservation* (2.00), Apartment Managers, Directors of Public Housing, New Home Marketers, and Real Estate Agents have similar competency needs. However, FIDER standards are considerably higher for *detailing* (3.00). In addition, FIDER standards for *laws, codes, and ordinances* (3.00) are higher than those necessary in the housing professions, but only slightly higher than those for Directors of Public Housing and New Home Marketers. It is interesting to note that in many of the

Table 3. Comparison of Competency Requirements: Technical

Knowledge/ Skill Area	FIDER Standards	Apt. Manager (n=20)	Dir. Public Housing (n=5)	New Home Marketer (n=9)	RE Agent (n=23)	Leasing Agent (n=10)	Mortgage Lender (n=9)
Structure and construction	2.00	1.73	1.67	2.53	1.64	1.00	1.82
Building systems	2.00	2.07	1.67	2.13	1.52	1.00	1.55
Energy conservation	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.07	1.60	1.50	1.36
Detailing	3.00	1.57	1.33	2.13	1.52	1.00	1.00
Materials, finishes	3.00	2.00	2.00	2.53	1.69	1.50	1.60
Laws, codes, ordinances	3.00	2.40	2.67	2.80	2.19	2.50	2.00

Note: Average Competency Levels Required: 0=none; 1=awareness; 2=understanding; 3=competent

Table 4. Comparison of Competency Requirements: Communication Skills

Knowledge/ Skill Area	FIDER Standards	Apt. Manager (n=20)	Dir. Public Housing (n=5)	New Home Marketer (n=9)	RE Agent (n=23)	Leasing Agent (n=10)	Mortgage Lender (n=9)
Visual presentation	3.00	1.50	1.33	1.93	1.25	1.50	1.09
Graphics	3.00	1.31	1.00	1.47	0.96	1.00	0.80
Drafting	3.00	1.21	1.00	1.67	1.09	1.00	0.90
Oral/written presentation	3.00	2.80	3.00	2.87	2.88	3.00	2.82
Computer systems	1.00	2.67	1.67	2.14	2.24	2.50	2.30

Note: Average Competency Level Required: 0=none; 1=awareness; 2=understanding; 3=competent

Technical knowledge/skill areas, not only do the housing professionals as a whole differ from the FIDER standards, they differ from each other.

Communication Skills

In all cases, FIDER standards for *visual presentation*, *graphics*, and *drafting* (3.00) are higher than those needed in the housing professions. Clearly, the housing professionals see little need for visual communication. The need for *oral/written presentation* skills is high for all housing professions as well as for interior design. However, FIDER standards for *computer systems* (1.00) is lower than those needed for all housing professions.

Table 5. Comparison of Competency Requirements: History of Art and Design

Knowledge/ Skill Area	FIDER Standards	Apt. Manager (n=20)	Dir. Public Housing (n=5)	New Home Marketer (n=9)	RE Agent (n=23)	Leasing Agent (n=10)	Mortgage Lender (n=9)
Art, arch., interiors	2.00	1.71	1.67	1.67	1.50	1.50	1.00
Furniture, textiles, accessories	2.00	1.21	1.00	1.47	0.96	1.00	0.80

Note: Average Competency Levels Required: 0=none; 1=awareness; 2=understanding; 3=competent

History of Art and Design

FIDER standards suggest that interior designers have an understanding (2.00) of the *history of art, architecture, and interiors*, as well as of *furniture, textiles, and accessories*. However, these standards are higher than are necessary for the housing professions. This result is not surprising, given the lack of emphasis on style among the housing professions represented in the study.

One theme that surfaced in the responses to open-ended questions dealt with additional competencies required in the housing professions other than those addressed by the FIDER standards. Many of the housing professionals indicated the need for competencies in the following areas:

- * basic math, accounting, and finance;
- * land development and surveying;
- * facilities management;
- * personnel management;
- * others specific to certification/licensing.

Summary

Results of this investigation reveal that housing professionals have some of the same competency requirements as do interior designers. Apartment Managers and New Home Marketers were each 0.5 or less from the FIDER standards for eight of the 21 knowledge/skill areas. Public Housing Directors deviated 0.5 or less on seven knowledge/skill areas. A deviation of 0.5 from six of the knowledge/skill areas was calculated for both Real Estate Agents and Leasing Agents. Finally, Mortgage Lenders responded similarly to the FIDER standards in only four knowledge/skill areas.

Conclusion

Regarding the objective of this study, the results show that there is an overlap in the competencies required in Interior Design and Housing. However, the overlap is not so great that the Interior Design curriculum can automatically satisfy the academic needs of those students seeking employment in the Housing industry. Courses specific to each profession need to be offered.

The results also suggest that Interior Design programs may want to market some of their courses to students in housing-related majors across the university campus (such as Real Estate and Finance programs in business), as these future professionals need many of the courses traditionally taught in the Interior Design curriculum. Finally, if the increasing number of Interior Design graduates are unable to locate employment in their chosen field, they may consider an alternate career in the housing profession with only minor changes in educational requirements.

As the trend toward a reduction in the Housing major continues, additional research of this type is needed. It is suggested that future investigations expand the use of Dillman's *Total Design Method* to include additional mailings to increase the sample size. Offering respondents a gift or stipend for participation may also improve the number of respondents. A large sample would not only be more representative of the population, but would also allow for more sophisticated analysis of the results.

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