

PRESS RELEASE

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EDUCATOR'S CRASH COURSE ON ECODESIGN IS LAUNCHED

New Onsite Program to Bring Design Educators Up to Speed on Sustainable Design

"Educating the Educators: A Crash Course on Eco Design™," an in depth seminar intended to introduce faculty members to the history, theory and teaching methodologies of ecodesign, is now available to design departments throughout the country. The daylong course, created by designers and instructors David Bergman and Erika Doering, is intended to bring instructors up to speed in a rapidly expanding and essential area of study.

The seminar is a direct outgrowth of an exhibit and conference co-organized and co-curated last year by Bergman and Doering for O2NY. That event, called "Assignment: Green," was a survey of the current state of ecodesign education in the design schools of New York City and culminated with an evening forum in which instructors, administrators, students and practicing professionals -- from different design disciplines as well as many of the participating degree programs -- discussed what the needs were and what stumbling blocks existed in promoting the growth of ecodesign education.

Satisfying a Need for Teaching Tools and Materials

Out of that forum came the realization that ecodesign must be infused throughout design education programs and that one of the most pressing needs was for a reliable source of information, tools and teaching materials. Bergman and Doering's "Educating the Educators: A Crash Course on Eco Design," and its accompanying toolkit (a 60+ page book of resources, definitions, etc.), was the result.

The viewpoint of the seminar is that many educators have not received any training in ecodesign or sustainable design because the field either did not exist or was not emphasized during their education and that, therefore, there is a need to disseminate sound and succinct information in a way that is complementary to existing courses and curricula.

Said Doering and Bergman: "Our goal is not to facilitate ecodesign courses. It is to go beyond that first step and have ecodesign become an integral part of design education, to break down the separation and "niche-ing" of ecodesign. Only then will we recognize that ecodesign is not an option, that it is as central and crucial as the other principles by which we evaluate design."

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Because the field of sustainable design is a relatively new one, there is a lot of mystery and misinformation surrounding it. "Educating the Educators: A Crash Course on Eco Design" is designed to address those issues. The seminar is tailored to each design field (e.g. industrial/product design, architecture, interior design, fashion design, graphic design) and to each department or school's program with the realization that every program is different and requires different foci.

The seminar's contents include a synopsis of the ecological status of the planet, a historical overview of the environmental movement, an explanation of eco and sustainability terminology, and principles and approaches to ecodesign. A hands-on segment presents environmentally conscious materials and discusses how to evaluate them. Other components can include panel discussions, class lectures and student project crits.

Exploring the Role of Ecodesign in Design Education

Another objective of the Crash Course is to bridge the gap between the ecodesign world and the "rest" of design, addressing preconceptions about the nature of ecodesign. A significant part of the day's materials deals with topics such as the mainstreaming of ecodesign and with the economic benefits to producers, consumers and the general public. Among the economic concepts included are natural capital and true costing as well as explanations of tools like Life Cycle Analysis. So, much of the presentation as well as later discussions stress not just that we "ought to" include ecodesign, but that we should "want to." Paralleling this topic is a discussion of how ecodesign principles can be integrated into current design education.

A Debut at Parsons School of Design

The seminar's first presentation was in the fall of 2003 at the Parsons School of Design in New York City. For an entire Saturday, forty members of the Product Design faculty listened and participated as Bergman and Doering, along with invited guests and panelists, discussed how and why to weave sustainable design into the mission of the department's curricula. The day was keyed by Colin Cathcart, architect and educator specializing in sustainable design.

Susan Szenasy, editor-in-chief of Metropolis, attended the daylong event (and moderated a panel discussion) and later wrote in Metropolis "teachers at Parsons School of Design got a chance to learn how they can be part of the solution....Armed with scientific, anecdotal and experiential information – as well as a well researched sourcebook – the teachers went away with ideas they could integrate into their fall syllabi..."

Lyn Godley, adjunct instructor at Parsons, said: "The seminar was not only eye opening, but also inspiring." And Tony Whitfield, Chair of the Product Design Department wrote: "David Bergman and Erika Doering together have been instrumental in promoting and advancing the state of environmental design education in this department and the University."

Doering and Bergman are available to present the seminar throughout the U.S. and Canada. Prior to the seminar, they hold a discussion with the host institution to review the host's existing curricula as well as their current ecodesign offerings, levels of faculty expertise and existing resources. This enables the presenters to modify the materials to the specific needs of the host.