FRAMES-FOR-WORK: DESIGNING KITCHENS

At every studio we visited, there were strategically designed, complex learning environments, or what we are calling “frames-for-work.” Instead of prescribing what and how students learn, studio faculty assembled constellations of “tools, raw materials, spaces, media, and people” and set students loose (Sheridan). Similarly, Byron Hawk has written of the need to “build smarter environments in which . . . students work. . . . [We must create] constellations of architectures, technologies, texts, bodies, histories, heuristics, enactments, and desires that produce the conditions of possibility for emergence, for invention (249). These frames-for-work, then, enable invention, and that means connecting students with knowledge, material, and spaces that can facilitate their thinking and making practices. It also means making it clear that student choice drives and demonstrates learning. The “processes of rhetorical invention,” David Sheridan reminds us, “are cognitive, but they are also social and material (“[A Maker Mentality](http://www.digitalrhetoriccollaborative.org/2016/03/28/a-maker-mentality-toward-writing/)”).

The environments represented in the sketches we include here all share certain qualities. First, students are asked to work on issues that are extremely complicated; learning-oriented design studios double down on this complexity by requiring students to engage in multiple processes and to work in fluid team arrangements at different levels of scale. Second, these design studios had a distinct ethos, or what might be described as a “can-do” attitude that is both serious-minded and fun at same time. Third, students are cautioned against committing to any one path as they proceed with their project. This intentional ambiguity, underscored by rapid prototyping and iteration, keeps open the possibility of successful experimentation, but also the well-known “productive failure” of design methods, in which students learn “how to assimilate [failure] and to use it to move forward” ([Farson in APJ 57](https://www.amazon.com/Four-1-Studios-Ann-Pendleton-Jullian/dp/1449996345)). Lastly, these frames-for-work seem to encourage students to merge the creative with the critical. By collaborating, facing complex problems, and conducting serious, self-driven research, students gravitate towards inventive, creative solutions using grounded critical thinking to reach potentially powerful ends.