

# Junior Certificate in Interior Design: Rationale, Development, Status

STEPHANIE A. CLEMONS, PH.D.  
Colorado State University

## ABSTRACT

### **PURPOSE**

This presentation will discuss the development of an interior design examination and “junior certificate” for high school and entry-level community college students to assess student learning at the pre-professional level. Discussion will be solicited concerning the potential impact of this examination/certificate on the profession.

### **IMPORTANCE OF TOPIC**

Teens learn about interior design from three primary sources: architecture (AIA Foundation programs), design reality shows (Waxman & Clemons, 2005), and Family and Consumer Science (FCS) courses at the secondary education level. None of these sources accurately portray the full scope of the interior design profession; particularly related to commercial design.

Economic demands have placed high school interior design courses at risk (McGinnis, 2009). New federal mandates (e.g. Perkins IV legislation) necessitate a national pre-professional assessment to receive future funding for interior design courses at the secondary and community college levels. In response, the American Association of Family & Consumer Sciences (AAFCS) created a national assessment for interior design. Upon successful completion of the exam, students may receive credit toward an associate or bachelor degree in interior design and/or earn a credential to enhance employment potential upon graduation. See Table 1.

### **PROCESS**

Thirty states (See Figure 1) funded the development of the examination and a formal process was followed. 1) Partnerships with industry and education organizations (e.g. American Society of Interior Designers (ASID)

and the Interior Design Educators Council (IDEC) were formed to ensure content accuracy. 2) A fifteen member board offered input from practice, employment paths (e.g. IKEA), and various education levels. 3) Categories of interior design content were identified and weighted. A seventy-question exam, based on Bloom’s Taxonomy three cognitive levels, was created and a pilot study conducted to assess its validity. Psychometric data guided revisions. 4) A certificate name including, appropriate language for public understanding, was identified.

### **RELEVANCE TO INTERIOR DESIGN**

Both the public and teens lack an accurate understanding of the qualifications needed to be an interior design professional. Evidence of this can be seen in legislative arenas and on college campuses. At the same time, a shortage of educators at higher education institutions exists (SIDE, 2009) with few teachers educated accurately on interior design at the secondary level.

There is concern that the junior certificate will “muddy the water” in defining the “path to professionalism.” Could the term “certificate” lead to confusion if used both at the pre-professional and the professional level? Will there be more demand at the higher education level when educators are already stressed? How will this examination shape the future of interior design?

Educating the public is critical to their understanding of our profession. A needed channel of dissemination through AAFCS teachers now exists. These teachers are interested in receiving information from practice and education (Clemons, 2007) and eager to teach high school students about interior design. As an assessment tool, the AAFCS examination will shape teaching and learning at the secondary level. If properly developed and positioned, this examination/certificate could assist

in clarifying the channel to the interior design “professional;” a needed message inside and outside the profession.

## NARRATIVE

### *INTRODUCTION*

Teens learn about the career of interior design from three primary sources. The first is through national architecture programs delivered in elementary and secondary levels (K-12). Most recently, the American Institute of Architects (AIA) joined with the American Architectural Foundation (AAF) and Chicago Architectural Foundation (CAF) in the Architecture + Design Education Network (A + DEN) to offer architecture curriculum on a national level (AIA, 2010). The second way is through viewing design reality shows that have permeated households through HGTV (Waxman & Clemons, 2005). The third way is through Family and Consumer Science (FCS) courses taught at the high school level; sometimes as many as four at one high school (D. Griffin, personal communication, December 17, 2009). Unfortunately, none of these sources accurately portray the full scope of the interior design profession; particularly related to commercial design.

A recent briefing by the United States Department of Occupational Education (DOE) revealed a shift in education goals by our national administration: from No Child Left Behind to a system of helping all students graduate from high school college and career-ready (U.S. Department, 2010). Within the Career and Technical Education (CTE) area, where interior design resides in secondary education, this budget directs states to create programs of study that lead to industry-recognized credentials or associate/baccalaureate degrees.

The interior design profession has concentrated more on the “college to professional” career path and less on educating youth about interior design at the high school level. Therefore, an industry-recognized credential or assessment tool needed by high school programs has not been developed. Economic demands have placed existing high school interior design courses at risk (G. N. McGinnis, personal communication, March 19, 2009). Federal mandates (e.g. Perkins IV legislation) necessitate an industry-recognized credential to receive future funding for interior design courses at the secondary and community college levels. In response, the American Association of Family & Consumer Sciences (AAFCS) created the Pre-Professional Assessment and Certification (Pre-PAC) program, a national assessment and certification system for eleven high school programs; one of

which is interior design.

This presentation will discuss the development of an interior design examination and “junior certificate” for high school and entry-level community college students to assess student learning at the pre-professional level.

### **BACKGROUND**

Research has indicated that a gap exists in the interior design education continuum from “kindergarten to career.” In part, this may be due to a lack of knowledge of how and where to begin (Clemons, 2007) or a lack of resources to address this complex task on a national level.

What education children and youth have received about interior design has been inadequate and inaccurate. Recognition of this issue is not new to design educators. Since the early 90’s, research has indicated that interior design has been inaccurately represented in the built environment continuum (Tew and Portillo, 1993). As early as 1992, Dohr discussed the need for interior designers to be involved in K-12. In 1998, Clemons proposed a comprehensive model for collaborative involvement of interior design professionals in the K-12 arena. More recently, Clemons (2007) reported research conducted with K-12 teachers and curriculum specialists on how and what is needed to assist teachers in the K-12 level. Yet, due to a lack of resources or cohesive plan, little has been done with this information and research.

Youth are not the only ones that lack an accurate understanding of the qualifications needed to be an interior design professional. Evidence of this can be seen in legislative arenas across the country and on college campuses as students participate in entry-level courses. Yet, the timing to address this issue from the design educators’ point of view is poor. A shortage of interior design educators at higher education institutions exists (SIDE, 2009); therefore efforts and resources have been understandably prioritized toward attracting and educating design practitioners into the higher education arena rather than offering more accurate educational materials to high school students.

Despite the bad timing, both the American Society of Interior Designers (ASID) and the Interior Design Educa-

tors Council (IDEC) have K-12 initiatives identified on their national strategic plans (ASID, 2010; IDEC, 2010). In addition, as early as 2000, the International Interior Design Association (IIDA) Foundation funded research concerning the resources and interior design materials available in the K-12 arena (Clemons, 2001). The importance of educating youth about the career has reached national recognition both in education and in practice.

At the high school level, interior design resides in the “career and technical education” (CTE) division; an odd home as it is the only licensed career under the AAFCS rubric. Introductory courses are typically titled “housing and interiors” or “interior design” and use national standards developed by AAFCS to guide curriculum and lesson plan development (NASAFACS, 2010). These standards stress housing issues (e.g. public policy) and furnishings along with residential design; therefore commercial interiors are rarely mentioned. Typically, teachers have earned a master’s degree in Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) that requires a maximum of one to three classes in interior design (CSU, 2010). They are rarely specialists in interior design, nor do their responsibilities require it. Research indicates these teachers are eager for current and accurate information about the interior design career (Clemons, 2007).

### **PROCESS**

#### **Brief History**

In response to the national need for an interior design assessment, AAFCS began the process in 2008 of developing an interior design examination and certificate for high school and community college (entry-level) students. See Table 1 for perceived benefits. Interior design is one of their eleven examinations under development. See Table 2.

In March 2009, the state of Georgia approached IDEC inquiring about the existence of a national assessment. Supportive of developing one, IDEC discovered that AAFCS was in the process of doing so and developed a partnership with ASID to offer expertise in shaping AAFCS’s examination. In June 2009, an invitation was extended to all interior design related organizations inviting them to partner in this initiative.

#### Steps Taken

Thirty states (See Figure 1) partially funded the development of the examination and a formal process was followed. 1) As mentioned before, partnerships with industry and education organizations (e.g. American Society of Interior Designers (ASID) and the Interior Design Educators Council (IDEC) were formed to ensure content accuracy. 2) October 2009 a fifteen member Development Board was formed. They offered input from practice, potential employment paths (e.g. IKEA, NKBA), and secondary/post secondary education levels (community college and four-year institutions). 3) Categories of interior design content were identified and weighted by the Board. Six domain levels were identified that related to career paths, professional practice, design fundamentals, human factors, communication skills, and design application. Note: these domain categories were different than originally presented to the Board by AAFCS. 4) Between October 2009 and February 2010, a seventy-question exam, based on Bloom's Taxonomy three cognitive levels, was created with alternative questions identified for each category. Note: test banks provided from high school textbooks and other AAFCS sources relating to Housing and Interiors were insufficient. Many new questions were developed by interior design educators/practitioners and evaluated by exam experts. 5) February 2010 the certificate was named to assist the public in understanding the level of student "competencies." Note: this was a difficult phase of the process due to the profession's concern with the term "certificate" and "certification." 5) In March 2010, a pilot study was conducted to assess the exam's validity. Psychometric data guided revisions. Pilot testing provided psychometric data to establish test validity and reliability.

### **ASSESSMENT**

The assessment will be delivered fall 2010 using a computer-based format that provides a reporting mechanism for competency measurement and improvement/accountability. Images, diagrams and text will be used to assess learning. Administered tests will be offered at proctored sites and will use a unique combination of 70, four-option multiple choice items randomly selected from the item bank (AAFCS PRE-PAC, 2010). The pass rate will be based on an identified cut-score with printable certificates valid for three years. Individual institutions will determine whether students can use examination scores to earn college credit.

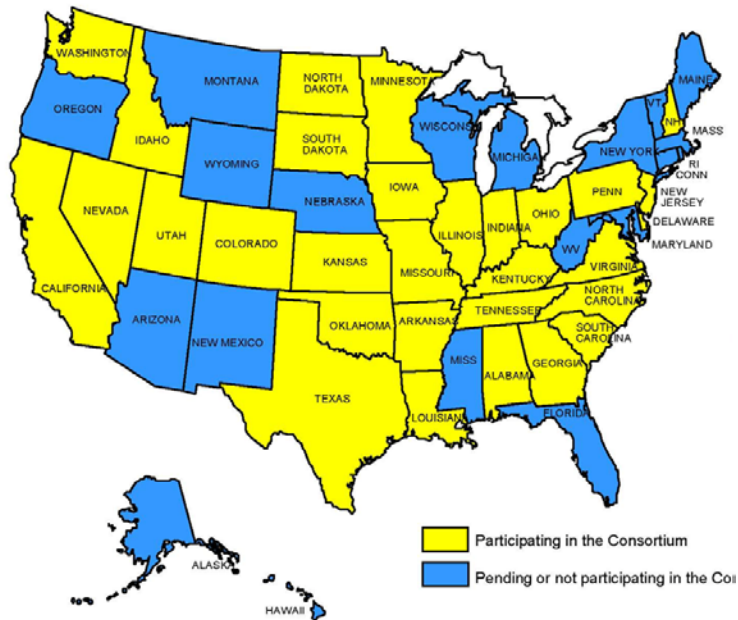
### **DISCUSSION + CONCLUSION**

Concerns exist related to this examination/certificate. Some are individual: Will students leave high school with their certificate, set up business, and take future clients? Others are more global: Will this junior certificate "muddy the water" in defining the "path to professionalism?" Could the term "certificate" lead to public confusion if used both at the pre-professional and the professional level? How will this examination shape the future of interior design? Others relate to higher education: Will there be more demand at the freshmen level when educators are already stressed? How will we need to adjust our classes based on this national initiative?

Educating the public is critical to their understanding the profession. A channel of dissemination into high schools is now available. High school teachers are open to receiving accurate information from professionals (Clemmons, 2007). As an assessment tool, the AAFCS examination will shape teaching and learning at the secondary level. If properly developed and positioned, this examination/certificate could assist in clarifying the channel to the interior design "professional;" a needed message inside and outside the profession.

*Note: Partial funding in support of this initiative was granted by the IDEC Strategic Initiatives Grant and the ASID Foundation.*

Figure 1. Consortium of states funding AAFCS examination/certificate.



Map developed by AAFCS, October 2009

Table 1. Perceived assessment tool benefits.

#### *Benefits to high school students*

- Career starter program for high school students
- Enhanced understanding of interior design profession
- Potential college credits earned during high school (articulation to colleges or post secondary partners)
- Certificate recognition of extra academic efforts

#### *Benefits to high school programs*

- Nationally recognized/endorsed certificate that indicates an assessment of learning; used to procure Federal funding related to career-building programs (e.g. Perkins grants); end of pathway assessment
- Teaching opportunity for high school teachers; encouragement for schools to keep interior design courses as part of their standard curriculum
- Support of state legislation (e.g. Georgia – bill in process states that students in Career Tech programs will leave with a national certificate confirming they have passed a national assessment from business/industry).
- Validation of programs are meeting business and industry needs as well as encouraging student success

#### *Benefits to practitioners/educators*

- Educates potential interior design educators, practitioners, and students
- Assists interior design high school student locate major before entering college
- Removes myths perpetuated through design reality shows

Table 2. List of pre-professional assessments/certificates under development by AAFCS.

Broad Field Family and Consumer Sciences	Food Science
Culinary Arts	Housing
Early Childhood Education	Interior Design
Education Careers	Nutrition
Family Services	Personal and Family Finance
Fashion, Textiles, and Apparel	

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