



by Nathalie Rozot

A 'career' in lighting will mean many different things for Generation Y

Who do you want to be? This deceptively simple question can make a large difference between a career that is mapped out and one that is created. One's career *path* often begins with one's education, but it is also guided by passions, abilities, values, personal life, and one's social, cultural and historical context. A *career* is a lifelong sum of paid and pro bono work; it is an individual process of self-discovery of one's interests and skills, and the pursuit of roles and situations that fit one's short-term goals as well as long-term aspirations.

In the October issue of *LD+A*, IES president Daniel G. Salinas related how he described a career to an audience of emerging professionals as "a journey with opportunities, challenges and accomplishments, which when added together make for a far more fulfilling and sustainable life than goal chasing." I agree and I also believe that courses in professional practice must provide graduating students with the ability to prepare for this journey, and to seek, recognize, create and choose opportunities.

Today, while Baby Boomers are retiring and Gen Xers are computing their retirement age, Gen Yers (the generation born after 1980) are entering the workforce and stepping into careers that are likely to last longer than 40 years. Not only can they expect to make several changes throughout their career or careers—in the 21st century very few people are expected to have the same job or occupation for life—but they will also practice in a professional landscape distinct from ours in ways not known.

As my predecessor in this column

Edward Bartholomew observed in "How to Build a Lighting Professional," today's spectrum of opportunities is wide. Our industry comprises a variety of professionals in design, manufacturing, sales, art, fundamental and applied research, academia, etc. Gen Yers' spectrum of professional practices and occupations may or may not be wider, but it will include a range of professions that have yet to mature or emerge, in addition to or in place of present jobs.

We already know some of the drivers of change: The ongoing digitalization of lighting is increasing the need for specialization in electronics and IT; current research on light and health in humans and all living systems is pushing the hybridization of design and scientific disciplines; trends in energy efficiency and environmental conservation are breeding new business models for design practices; the modeling of building systems in the early design phases with BIM is transforming the production and collaboration processes in design and construction; etc. In addition, the question of licensure for the lighting scope will largely affect the evolution of our industry's identity and practices. Professional practices in lighting have eluded equilibrium throughout our young industry's lifetime, and it seems unlikely that this trend will change soon.

GEN Yers AT WORK: 2011-2061

When I was assigned to teach Professional Practice at the Parsons graduate program in Lighting Design in 2011, the course's learning objectives were focused on conventional practice in architectural lighting design. I added one: "To understand lighting design as a field of expertise," and I restructured the syllabus in order to inte-

grate two concepts into the curriculum. In the broad sense, the topic of professional practice addresses immediate jobs as well as gradual careers. In addition, occupations that rely on the expertise in light and lighting for the constructed environments evolve and expand beyond conventional architectural lighting design, and will continue to do so.

The content included legal, regulatory and ethical framework (using present-day U.S. as a case study since these vary with time

shared results of their research and from the lecturers' experiences with their own interests, and developed illustrated biographical narratives for fictional Gen Yer professionals whose careers spanned 2011-2061.

BE THE CHANGE

Some career strategies are specific to a particular industry or discipline, but many are not. Career development requires self-assessment and personal resource man-

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and location), managerial and financial planning, design projects' graphical and technical documentation, as well as employment applications and marketing tools.

In the meantime, I gave assignments that were designed to help students put their immediate post-graduation employment into perspective, and start reflecting on a lasting journey in the field of light. All assignments were group projects to facilitate brainstorming and candid exchange.

Research topics included Richard Kelly's practice within his cultural historical context; theatrical lighting practice as business; light art/interactive media/design practices; animating light—who designs lighting for Pixar?; research practices in light and lighting; and future lighting practices. At the same time, I invited several alumni who graciously came in and spoke about their experiences in lighting sales, manufacturing, art, research and academia.

For a final assignment, students combined the knowledge they had gained from the

agement techniques. Overall, it requires the ability to problem solve and be open to new knowledge and opportunities that best serve rewarding practices and careers. Over time, work and track record better represent professional capabilities and effectiveness than degrees or years of experience do.

A course in professional practice should provoke a critical awareness of both conventional and alternative modes of practice. It should expose students to the diverse practices and professional avenues that are open to them to help them decide the future role(s) they wish to play in the profession and the world.

We cannot predict our students' future, but we can coach them to invent it.

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