

Immersion in the Workplace: A Unique Model for Students to Engage in Real-World Service Design

Anezka Sebek * and John Jones **

Abstract: Since 2015, Fjord and Parsons School of Design have been collaborating to create a mutually beneficial alternative to internships by immersing Design and Technology graduate students in the one-week Fjord Immersive Design Studies. The Design Studies at Fjord operate outside of direct client work and are a perfect vehicle to engage students in structured human-centered design research.

The mission of the Fjord/Parsons Immersion Program is to influence the future of design, to shape future designers, and to propel Fjord's service design innovation. For the Parsons students, the experience as contributing members of a service design team is an unusual benefit. While traditional months-long internship programs can sometimes be a strain on company resources or an unproductive learning experience for students, the Fjord/Parsons Immersion Program is an excellent alternative training opportunity to engage students in meaningful work to achieve valuable research in human-centered service design for Fjord. This paper discusses six cases of Parsons graduate students who benefitted from the program.

Keywords: rethinking internships - design practice - design research - design thinking - design study - service design.

[Abstract in spanish and portuguese on pages 244-245]

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to The India Institute of Technology in Gandhinagar, India to participate in *Design for a Billion*, a two-week study that explored complex design problems and their possible solutions in a rapidly developing nation. Her Ph.D. in Sociology (2016) dissertation, *Family Homelessness in the Small City* is an ethnographic qualitative methods study of the social strata and bureaucracies that control the lack of affordable housing and living-wage jobs in post-industrial Northeast American cities.

(**) John Jones, *Senior Vice President and Design Strategy Lead* at Fjord, New York. John Jones is SVP Design Strategy at Fjord, collaborating with global Fjord studios on future-focused methods and services, executive-level creative and strategic leadership, designing new processes and products that span mobile, web, social and physical spaces. He and Roman Kalantari founded the Fjord Makeshop, and the Design Studies Process. The Makeshop is a focused, tactile process, co-creating with clients to physically build services and quickly learn from experimentation to help the service evolve with deeper understanding. Fjord Design Studies is a continuous Design Exploration process. In an effort to sustain innovation, this process identifies human-centered Design Study themes to explore. By focusing on behavior, interaction with devices, environments and human needs we are able to uncover unexpected new service models. The Makeshop “build to think” iterative design process has resulted in hundreds of innovations for clients and many ‘firsts’ in Times Square, retail spaces, and mobile platforms. Previously, John was SVP, Executive Creative Director at R/GA where he founded R/GA’s Global Retail and Digital Environments practice and the R/GA LAB, an exploration and workshop space dedicated to consumer insights and new methods of interaction for in-store, mobile, online and branded environments.

Introduction

The authors of this article knew each other as faculty in the Master of Fine Arts [MFA] in Design and Technology Program at Parsons School of Design, a college within The New School University. A few years ago, John Jones, Senior Vice President of Design Strategy at Fjord, attended one of Anezka Sebek’s studio critiques at Parsons. One student was a very capable thinker and creator; his rough prototypes were imaginative, yet he never fully realized his projects and often abandoned his ideas. Anezka had noticed a similar lack of students’ self-confidence in their creative process and their lack of understanding of the progression from ideation and prototyping to fully realized work. At their monthly breakfast, Anezka asked John about internship opportunities at Fjord so that the students in the MFA program could be exposed to a professional studio where ideation, prototyping, and implementation were a daily routine. However, John expressed his frustrations with interns who need too much nurturing for the short time, and the limited attention they have away from school, thus hampering the effective use of their talents. At the same time, he saw an opportunity to include students in Fjord’s week-long Design Studies. Instead of a long-term internship, the Fjord/Parsons Immersion Week gives a Parsons student the opportunity to participate in the Design Study as a full-time member of a Fjord creative team.

Most internships are exploitative or, at best, give students only a tiny glimpse into the world of work that is awaiting them. During the last economic recession in the U.S., internships exploited students more and more, and this added to the lack of integration of new talent in the workplace (Perlin, 2012). The economic crisis and attendant employment downturn are over, yet even in this historical moment of nearly full employment in the U.S., professional studios continue to acquire unpaid interns so the company can gain research and exploration at little to no cost. This use of unpaid interns for the studios' creative teams creates tension and contradiction. The student-interns offer their free time and creativity (receiving minimal personal benefit) while the studio exploits the relationship by using interns' work in the research and exploration for new ideas—and fiscal gain. This contradiction is called “organizational ambidexterity” in the management literature. As Andriopolous and Lewis (2010) note:

Companies frequently attempt to gain a competitive advantage in their market through innovation, yet this critical factor is often elusive. Obtaining innovation requires both exploration to tap new opportunities and exploitation to enhance existing capabilities (p. 104).

John Jones, as Design Strategy Lead, and Roman Kalantari, as Senior Design Director at Fjord, created an opportunity for employees to explore by performing ongoing research and experimentation in a process they call Design Studies. At the end of every week, Fjord runs a Design Clinic where designers come together to present and learn from each other and industry thought-leaders. At the Design Clinic, creatives also present findings from that particular week's Design Studies. Fjord's homegrown design research time thus seemed like a natural opportunity for “exploiting” Parsons' graduate students who could add to Fjord's exploration aims. The students benefit by participating as fully recognized contributors to the creative team while providing their services at no cost. According to Roman, “This has become a way to tap into the skills and enthusiasm of design students to focus on unsolved problems in [service] design. Fjord [in turn] gets quite a bit of value out of this great program.” To be clear, the student's time is transformed into a learning opportunity rather than an exploitation of his or her eagerness to enter the industry. Parsons and Fjord began the pilot study program with the student John and Anezka identified during Anezka's studio critique. The experiment was productive for Fjord as well as for the student (see Student A's Case); The Immersion Program has continued ever since. For each program, Anezka selects students well in advance of the week's start date. In Anezka's role as an Associate Professor of Media Design in the MFA Design and Technology Program at Parsons, she has contact with a community of over 160 graduate students from which she can draw candidates. Always on the lookout for the next Immersion Week candidate, she might see a student's work in a critique, or the student will come to her for career or study advice. She bases her selection of the student on a wide and intuitive set of criteria of need, demonstrated talent, imagination, high degree of persistence, and collaborative spirit. The winter, spring, and summer breaks in the graduate school calendar are the perfect timeframe for giving one student, one week at a time, the opportunity to participate in the Fjord studio's mutual exchange of teaching and learning.

The six case studies presented here are the first candidates in the Parsons/Fjord program since its inception in 2015. We anonymized students' identities at their request. Parsons and Fjord signed mutual non-disclosure agreements. The chosen Fjord Design Study theme is outside of paid client work, so it does not mandate a tangible product or outcome. Fjord and Parsons can share the resulting work and insights, thus exercising the paradoxical and “ambidextrous exploitation and exploration” model for the benefit of the company as well as for the student.

Fjord and Parsons Background

Fjord, founded in 2001 by Olof Schybergson, Mark Curtis, and Mike Beeston, aims to be a global leader in service design innovation. In 2013, Accenture PLC acquired Fjord and its design services in strategy, consulting, digital, technology, and operations of approximately 435,000 employees worldwide and \$34.9 billion USD in revenue. Service design evaluates the entire consumer experience and looks to improve the quality of that experience, or to create a new service. Service design uses methods and tools derived from different disciplines, ranging from ethnography to information, and management science to interaction design. The company often addresses design problems categorized as “wicked” by Rittel and Webber (1973) because they are grounded in cultural and social human conditions. To report on these difficult to solve business problems that seek a wide range of solutions, Fjord maintains a constant online blog presence, as well as a Twitter account and additional forms of social media.

The Fjord/Parsons collaboration is ideal. Parsons School of Design, established over one hundred years ago, is one of the colleges within The New School University. The School maintains a Paris campus, partners with several academic institutions around the world, and offers curricula that prioritizes global thinking, research, and experimentation. This academic approach meshes well with Fjord's global expanse and ongoing research and quest for innovation. The opportunity for Parsons students to engage as professional studio creatives, even for one week, also adheres to the School's goal of producing highly prepared graduates. The pursuit of design process innovation is also part of the college's curriculum. Within Parsons' Design and Technology MFA Program, established in 1997, the curricula address the challenges of designing for new tools in the context of rapidly emerging electronically networked technologies, and their effects on life on the planet. The cases presented here focus on process and findings for both Fjord and Parsons, thereby showcasing the nature of the Fjord/Parsons collaboration.

The Fjord Design Studies Process and Methods

Similar to the design thinking process codified by Tom and David Kelley at Stanford University's Design School in the early 1990s, a design study at the Fjord office begins by exploring a specific human-centered theme. For the Fjord team, the reason for the term “study” is to avoid the common industry discussions of “failing fast.” If explorations are viewed

as a “study” there is no need to fail at all. Examples of Fjord Design Studies include zero user interface (designing user interactions without screens), designing for relationships, extending community interactions, and data privacy. The week-long exploration focuses on defining hypotheses and experiments. It includes field interviews and observations in the target community, as well as the hands-on prototyping of ideas in the Fjord Makeshop. The week culminates in a presentation of these findings at the Fjord Design Clinic on Fridays. Fjord identifies the human-centered themes for the creative team and the student to explore. In Design Studies, the research is about human behavior as it applies to interaction with devices, environments, and human needs. The company looks to uncover new interactions and expectations for what it calls “Living Services,” or “next wave design where experiences evolve and sculpt around unique human needs.” The hands-on Design Studies processes create what Fjord aims to be a “habit of invention.” The aim is to identify areas of interest, conduct research, prototype, observe, field test, and document the entire process which then becomes the raw materials for designing new “Living Services.”

Fjord Design Studies have resulted in compelling points of view such as extending communities, guidelines for wearables, gesture interactions, invisible user interface, voice control, data visualization, and a collection of patent pending innovations. The Design Clinic is the Friday forum for continuous work, where the studio’s designers share new techniques. Fjord also invites guest speakers so they, too, may share new techniques and insights with the Fjord staff. Because the company is always evolving, its Design Studies continue as new needs and technologies emerge. Active documentation of the process in the form of a short description of findings lays the groundwork for new services. Not all of the work performed is purely speculative however; Fjord Design Studies, with Parsons students, have advanced to patents and final product prototypes.

Fjord’s Makeshop

The unique studio environment at Fjord includes a dedicated workshop space that facilitates co-creation with clients to develop innovative products and services. The proprietary Makeshop “build to think” process encourages a hands-on creative process, research, and field-testing to deepen the exploration of new ideas and services. Engaging in physical exploration is critical to the design process. The Makeshop allows creatives from all disciplines to collaborate in an open-ended physical exploration that leads to key insights about behavior and services.

MAKESHOP INGREDIENTS

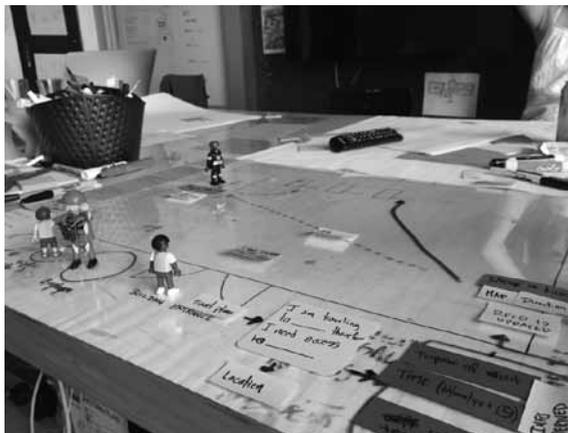
SPACE & MATERIALS	PROCESS	DESIGN STUDIES
DEDICATED SPACE	BUILD TO THINK	FOSTER GOOD HABITS
LOW FIDELITY MATERIALS	OPEN-ENDED EXPLORATION	CREATE NEW TYPES OF PROJECTS & WORK
ACCESSIBLE TO ALL	OPEN TO ALL DISCIPLINES	PARTNER WITH DESIGN PROGRAMS GLOBALLY

Following the Immersion Week research and observation in the field, all of the Parsons students cited the Makeshop as a place that is essential to fully experimenting with making their ideas into rough three-dimensional prototypes. The Makeshop process is critical for exploration and process since Fjord has found most people associate sketching with finished, beautiful art. The Makeshop introduces easily malleable materials of foam, cardboard, and tape, and this severs the notion of creating something fully finished. The materials alone prevent the prototype from becoming overly “precious” and completed. Rather, the process opens up the playful exploration of ideas in prototypical form. The Makeshop materials are unthreatening but allow for rapid development. The progression from what can be considered “low fidelity” to more evolved materials offers ideators a low-stakes opportunity at exploration.

In the Fjord Makeshop, one of the goals is the rapid progress of service concepts: building things to *think through* problems with a focus on designing for human needs and behavior. The team attempts to remove blockages for advancement in the project. Fjord Design Studies consider “technology last.” Thus, the team makes software or hardware platform suggestions only when there is full, initial understanding of human behaviors and needs.

PROGRESSION OF MATERIALS

LOW FIDELITY	MEDIUM FIDELITY	HIGH FIDELITY	PRODUCT LEVEL
PAPER	SKETCH UI ON DEVICES	DESIGNED UI ON DEVICES	FUNCTIONAL UI ON DEVICES
CLAY	CUT FOAM MOCKUPS	CUT FOAM MOCKUPS	3 RD PARTY FABRICATION
BALSA WOOD	MACHINED MDF OR WAX	MACHINED METAL AND ACRYLIC	CUSTOM ELECTRONICS
LINOLEUM	THERMOFORMED PLASTICS	CUSTOM ELECTRONICS	FUNCTIONAL SOFTWARE
PVC	BASIC ELECTRONICS	BASIC SOFTWARE	
PROXY DEVICES			



The Use of “Bench Time” for Innovation

Fjord uses Design Studies to perform further service design research of problems that clients may not ask to be solved, and for which there would otherwise be no resources or designers assigned. To explore new ideas, John and Roman request the participation of Fjord designers who are between projects (or, waiting “on the bench” for assignment to their next job). Design Studies are a great way for a creative team to learn new problem-solving processes. The result of leveraging this “bench” or “idle” time is that many creatives feel like they do more service design in a week of Design Studies; the Design Study experience challenges them to look at human behavior in ways that may be unexpected, and at a much faster pace than typical client-based work. This time-pressured process helps designers become more effective idea generators and problem solvers.

At the beginning of the Fjord/Parsons Immersion Week Program, it was a challenge to get a Fjord creative team assigned. However, in the second year of the program, the company created a training accounting code for the Design Study. Operationally, this allowed creatives to bill their study as training, thus leveraging their time “on the bench.” When the opportunity to use a Parsons student arises, the appropriate Fjord creatives are booked in advance. This ensures there is a complete creative team well suited for the Parsons Study theme.

Every quarter, the Design Study outcomes, surprises, and human behavioral insights are collected in one-page Design Study summaries. Creative teams use these findings and outcomes in the problems they encounter in paid work, thus channeling idle, or “bench time,” into exploration and future client-based work. Conversations with clients facilitate the use of Design Study insights to create further research problems to explore. John also distributes outcomes to the Fjord and Accenture teams outside of the New York Studio so they can put the team members to work on paying projects.

The Parsons/Fjord Immersion Week

The First Friday

The student participates in a Fjord Design Clinic. Fjord is a learning organization, and the Design Clinic every Friday is an opportunity to teach/learn a skill, or to host guest speakers who engage the studio in workshop activities. The student meets the two- or three-person team they will be working with during the Immersion Week.

Monday - Tuesday

Research on the theme begins with desk (online, library) research that then extends outside of the studio to research in the field amongst a target population. Often, the team will create questionnaires or other activities for the larger studio or target audience to explore.

Wednesday - Thursday

Makeshop: The team develops several iterations of physical prototypes to explore ideas revealed in the research activities and discussions.

Friday

At the Friday Design Clinic, the Parsons student discusses his/her background and graduate research, and what he/she learned during the Immersion Week at Fjord. Fjord uses these findings for the advancement of the creative process at the studio as it participates in teaching design and finding new talent. Several of the students ended their work in the Design Study with a Friday Design Clinic workshop in order to further explore the results of the week's Design Study Theme.

Student Meeting and Selecting the Theme

After a meeting with the new student candidate, Fjord selects a theme they are interested in exploring. Often, the student's background (or skillset) guides or inspires the selection of the theme. The Design Study themes are often, but not always, a reflection of what the student might be researching in their graduate school projects. These range from how people feel about the use of drones in public space, to fundamental studies of communication without screens, to designing for empathy, or generalized client challenges Fjordians may encounter from previous projects or studies. What Fjord needs from the week is new insights into human behavior that can then drive service design for a variety of applications with diverse clients.

At the first Friday Clinic, the student expects a design brief. Roman believes that people become stuck in research, and this may inhibit the use of their intuition and the imagination that is necessary for innovation. The student does not receive the theme assignment until Monday, so he/she goes home "empty-handed," a bit confused, but excited after the Friday Clinic.

The Friday Design Clinic is often unrelated to the theme the student will be working on, but it serves as the beginning of a dialogue about the week's theme. The student is asked, "What did you take away from that Design Clinic?" The answer provides some insight for a theme selection. It is important to find out what the student thinks the week is going to be about. The Fjord team then likes to be sure it is not quite what the student expected. As John states, "Whatever they thought it was on day one, over the course of the week, it's not what they thought."

Redirection and "Storming"

The Immersion Program's teaching style simulates real-world production where the needs and wants of a client may constantly shift. Part of the Design Study process is to disrupt expectations purposefully and to continuously stimulate the creative process. Thus, the aim is for participants to generate as many alternatives, combinations, and new questions as possible, just as designers are encouraged to do during classic brainstorming sessions (Osborne, 1963). John and Roman agree that the final goal of the Design Study is to produce new and surprising insights about human behavior.

To meet these goals, and thereby please the people at Fjord, the students often assume they need to invent something brilliant and new. However, although sometimes the finding(s) may seem trivial and small to the student, it is the insight surprise that John and Roman are actually seeking. Students need to be able to hypothesize, reflect, make, notice, and report the findings from the study, as Donald Schön teaches us. The practice of experimentation is one of constant recursion and iteration. Schön (1983) notes:

The situation talks back, the practitioner listens; and as [s/he] appreciates what [s/he] hears, [s/he] reframes the situation once again. [S/he] describes as “continual self-frustration,” [s/he] sets a restructured problem of interpretation which guides his [or her] further inquiry. In this reflective conversation, the practitioner’s effort to solve the reframed problem yields new discoveries, which call for new reflection-in-action. The process spirals through stages of appreciation, action, and re-appreciation (p. 132).

To facilitate this process of staying loose and messy –yet reflective in the process– “freak out,” or panic moments about the object of the design study are created. As soon as the student and the creative team gets comfortable, the team is re-directed. John and Roman have found that the process of constant redirection to encourage new ways of looking at a problem stimulates imaginative and creative thinking. It prevents the team from getting “precious” about the solution they have created, and this allows for the continuous evolution of the processes and ideas. A successful Design Study week produces behavioral findings that further the Fjord company aims of service design innovation.

Six Immersion Candidates and their Projects:

A. Graphic designer, but someone who is interested in pushing drone technology and a variety of concept and research methods. Project: *Human interaction with drones*: identifying specific behaviors, concerns and human reactions to awareness of drones and design of drone devices

B. An experienced international commercial director who embarked upon an MFA in DT to understand the U.S. market and also hone his skills as a creative in the four semesters. Project: *Designing for Empathy*: Focus on understanding and communicating wheelchair user experience to non-wheelchair users

C. Our youngest immersion candidate, yet someone who is a thinker and creator in a varied set of directions from narrative, design process, education, and industry. Project: *Personal Privacy*: defining our relationship with privacy and identifying ways people might be more likely to give up private information

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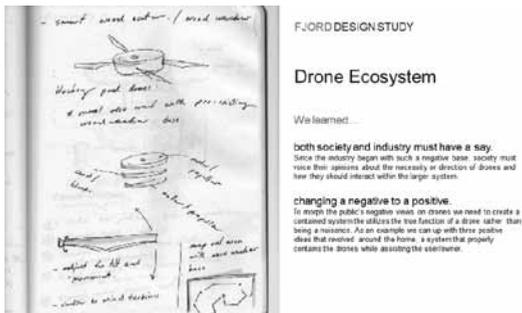
D. A mature industry systems analyst and experienced manager of software and data projects in collaborative settings. Project: *Communicating Personality*: finding simple combinations of words and pictures, which can be absorbed in a glance and help us communicate personality - going beyond the bio description and photo

E. Branding professional with little experience in a formal design process. Leadership qualities and the ability to present complex research and prototype ideas. Candidate E was the first, second year student we selected for the program. We originally decided that first year students would be ideal because we expected that the Fjord Immersion Program would prepare them for the design and creative processes during their thesis development. This candidate did not come to Anezka’s attention until the second year of their graduate studies. Fjord ultimately hired this candidate as a full-time employee. Project: *Identifying behavior in physical spaces*: logging behavior of people in specific spaces and identifying the right types of concepts to guide them to experiences

F. An experienced graphic and web designer. Project: *How can we create a visual experience that tells this story in a three-panel system and allows the user to engage with the product?*

Outcomes of Parsons/Fjord Design Studies

Being the first student in the Immersion Program was a challenge for Student A. Student A had a background in graphic design and undertook graduate studies in the Design and Technology Program to increase his skills in programming and overall knowledge of emerging media. His interest in experimenting with people’s attitudes toward drone technologies became the theme of his week at Fjord. In the service design industry, it is more important to focus on behavior and attitudes than the technological invention itself. For Student A, The Immersion Program was an opportunity to provide himself with “a greater understanding of interaction design and the drone industry, but also an understanding of the ability to answer critical questions through an accelerated and collaborative process.”



Student A used universal research methods and the Fjord creative team's content mapping process. He first created and tested a survey with a wide range of people to understand views on the military, commercial, and personal drones along with predictions of drone use in the future. However, the constant redirection for Student A was to keep people's attitudes in the center of his study, rather than his fascination and love of the drone technology. Here, he reports on his findings:

First, with the excessive use of drones during wartime efforts, people associate these machines/vehicles with killing. Second, even with drones becoming more popular in the public's eye, there is still a level of being uncomfortable and annoyed by a drone's presence. This level of annoyance could be caused by noise, privacy or even physical damage. Lastly, 47% of people still believe drones are negative and predict a higher usage in public spaces in the near future. These results and patterns were used to create actionable insights that validated assumptions and questions. I began questioning what the projected trends of drones would become, and how people could begin to interact with them in a more civilized and positive way. I wanted to engage people in the conversation. I wanted people to walk away with a basic understanding of drones and how they can and will affect our lives in the future. The immersion and final findings presentation was the perfect platform to develop and begin the conversation.

The success of Student A opened the door for more students to participate in the Program. The range of graduate students in the Immersion Program has offered different levels of successful outcomes.

Student B was an industry professional who had embarked on a graduate degree in the Design and Technology Program to broaden his understanding of the global industry, and to experience production and education in the U.S. The assignment for Student B arose out of a project Fjord had already assigned as a Design Study topic. He describes his experience:

When I started, the wheelchair project was a simple [virtual reality] exercise [for the Design Study] but I thought it was very promising. I used my one week to help the project reach its potential. Above all, it required an insight to go beyond a trivial experience and become a service idea and experience with human impact. Our research showed that unpleasant first day challenges in wheelchairs would be a good problem to tackle with the tools at hand. This quickly led us to the idea of a Wheelchair Training Program – a simulator offering a safe way to engage with a complex new environment and serving as a way to understand the new obstacles and issues. Along with the concept, I proposed some prototypes for the [user interface] and the simulation. We tried to make sure it didn't feel like a game; we did not want to create a superficial or insensitive experience.



FJORD DESIGN STUDY

Introduction

With vr.able, our goal is to go where people in wheelchairs experience, in order to create a tool to help them overcome the challenges of the situation and for able-bodied people empathize with people with disabilities. And the best tool for that is VR. To put it simply, vr.able is a wheelchair simulator.

For Fjord, Student B was (thus far) the most fully formed as a collaborator in the Design Study week. Student B immediately started to develop more detailed explorations. Fjord's teaching process was less about fundamental design thinking exercises and more about pushing Student B to gain insights more quickly. Student B may have gotten less out of the immersion process, but the study had great success and subsequent traction. Although Fjord was already looking at a virtual reality experience of the use of wheelchairs in urban space, Student B brought his own, unique approach to it and pushed the project further. Following this Design Study, many Fjord design teams worked on the virtual reality wheelchair project, partly because there was a lot of interest in the virtual reality wheelchair study already. As a result, the studio team produced a full-fledged prototype. Student C was one of the youngest, but nevertheless an ambitious Design and Technology graduate student; she had received a full scholarship and ultimately became the valedictorian of the MFA in Design and Technology Program's graduating class. She tells the story of her experience in the Fjord/Parsons Immersion Program:

The first couple of days, I spent my time ideating with Roman and John thinking about different ways to explore consumer notions of privacy and security. We were trying to understand the nuances about how consumers felt when sharing their sensitive information. In the first two days, we created a hierarchy of sensitive information. The test was simple: in exchange for varying levels of information, we'd give users a nice glass of lemonade; a larger size for more information. If consumers were willing to share extra-sensitive information, like a thumbprint, we'd give them a cookie. We designed the test on Wednesday, conducted the test on a busy street corner on Thursday, and analyzed the results of the test in a Friday workshop.



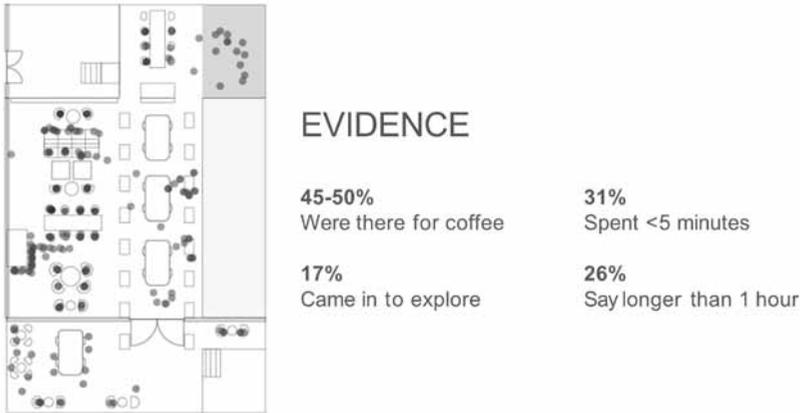
Data Privacy Lemonade Stand

Student C had many ideas from the start, and even had a structure for how she wanted to put it together. John challenged her initial ideas and framework by providing the Design Study questions, “How do people value their privacy?” and “How would you explore it?” This study raised compelling insights and questions. For example, once the value of our personal/private data is established, should there be an opportunity to create a personal economy out of the data? John postulates that people should sell their own data, rather than allow Facebook to have it and sell it, without any form of return to the creator(s). What would the structure of a personal economy look like? Instead of presenting a formal report of findings at the study’s conclusion on Friday, this Design Study team organized a workshop with studio creatives to build on the idea further. This was a strong and difficult brief, yet the Fjord creative team and Student C worked well together, and Fjordians are still praising this Design Study today.

Because of the pre-interviews and multiple design studies in progress, some of the student and team matches were particularly successful. For example, Student C had already done quite a bit of research about the topic of data privacy before Anezka selected her for the study. She had already been analyzing a range of privacy policies and this previous work created an excellent fit with the Fjord team, thus deepening the student’s learning and overall experience.

The next candidate, Student E, had experience in branding design. As opposed to the students that preceded her, Anezka made the decision to expose her to the experience near the end of her graduate studies. What set this student apart immediately was her ability to prototype in the Makeshop –and that she was someone who is not afraid to experiment. The Design Study question for Student E was to analyze traffic and people’s activities in a specific space. What are people doing there? Without mounting cameras for tracking peo-

ple in space, Student E came up with a method of mapping people in the space by hand: a paper-based “heat-map” that showed where people were dwelling or standing. This technique is what Student E learned from William Whyte’s *Social Life of Small Urban Spaces* (1980). The Design and Technology graduate students often use this tool to analyze urban (exterior) space. Student E spent a lot of time performing the analysis before developing the concepts that she and the team thought would help activate the space in a different way. The Design Study then asked, “What should the people do in the space?” For example, if people walking by a coffee shop need to have awareness about something, should the coffee shop employees wear a t-shirt with an imprinted message? What do people do while sitting at the tables? What about the people who work in the space all day?



Student E began the challenge by talking to the people in the space. The whole team then came up with base-level behavioral insights. The student then mocked up the concepts such as the signage on the tables to show what was happening in the space and signage in the window that created awareness; she designed the messaging that would go into the space. The space owners (who were unaware of their customers’ behaviors) were presented with the study’s findings and incorporated them into their business.

Student E’s unafraid and proactive spirit made a big difference in the work she performed. Roman remarked:

This is a quality that we look for in all of our designers. At Fjord, every product is different. Every business, every scenario, everything is different, and I think there should be a fearlessness to jump right in there and get into it. I think people who have that [quality] thrive particularly well in this Immersion Program. It is not necessarily a requirement to do good work in the structure, but the

people who really shine have that [drive]. There are other people who are a bit slower to come to it, who are a little more nervous about it, or have discomfort with it. Others ease into it and do some amazing work. Certainly, in the one-week format, the less time you spend easing in, the better.

Soon after Student E completed her graduate studies in the Design and Technology Program, Fjord hired her. Speaking with Student E recently, she said that working at Fjord for one week doesn't "hold a candle" to what she currently experiences and knows about service design as a full-time designer with Fjord. Student E did not know which aspect of the industry she wanted to work in and it was fortunate that the Immersion Program at Fjord coincided with the completion of her graduate studies at Parsons.

Design Studies as Learning/Teaching Environment

While these examples of participants' work yielded results that were productive for the Fjord creative team and for the students, Student D provided much more of an opportunity for the Design Studies process to become a teaching experiment. Student D was an experienced business consultant looking to expand her creative technology skills through the MFA in Design and Technology Program. The chosen theme for the student's Design Study was "communicating personality."

Student D initial assumptions about the topic were limiting, so Roman gently encouraged Student D into exploring the ideas of personality more closely. The lesson she learned was that design is about problem solving. The Design Study team experimented by enacting a scenario as a study of personality, and by playing with improvisational interactions to make people become more present to a situation. Through the experimentation, Student D and her team discovered people can be slowed down to concentrate more in the moment if they are presented with words and pictures that don't match (rather than words and pictures do match). The student's own assessment of the process did not reflect that she necessarily understood the value of the subtle outcomes of these experiments. John believes that the best outcome of Student D's Design Study is that it provided a good foundation for future studies, thus providing Fjord with valuable research questions. As Student D noted:

My project was a huge, huge topic, but the beauty of the way [John and Roman] work is that we always regrouped multiple times to look at what I had accomplished during the day and approach the question/topic/project with curiosity and new eyes. We redefined the question constantly and we made the material useful and the work meaningful. Nothing was discarded as a waste of time. It was all usable.

Roman kept asking me the hard questions and pushing me further. I trusted him and appreciated him absolutely. The principles I learned from Roman and John were the positive outcomes more so than any answers I got from the

project. The time I spent talking to Roman and John about their work, their approach, the way they think, what they do, how they handle “failure,” what they are looking for, how to stay open, how to stay curious, how not to be too precious about your ideas. Their wisdom and experience were very inspiring. All of that was more valuable to me than the actual results of my project.

Student F, a graphic designer, was placed in a study that was already in progress. The study’s aim was to work on a methodology of a three-frame storyboard structure and to extend the work that Student E and the creative team had begun. It is apparent from Student F’s comments that she was more in a position of observing a process that was already in place, rather than being a fully contributing member of the team. However, she felt the observation process was a beneficial and positive outcome. Although Fjord gave her less agency to control the process than other Immersion Week students, the company’s team felt she still learned a lot from what may have seemed to be a chaotic process. Student F felt the same and stated:

The goal for the week was to tell the story of one of the designer’s products –a scarf– and how it would be distributed to benefit an organization. For our first prototype, we worked on how we would tell the story through text and images that were displayed vertically or horizontally. We user-tested to see which images and what amount of text told the story, and to which layout people gravitated. For our second prototype, we set up a display with a body form wearing the scarf and images and set we selected. For our third prototype, we created a display at the entrance of the firm and asked individuals to test out the display with three design options with different interactions. We followed up with questions to find out which design was the simplest and told our story.

On my last day, we did user tests on a different floor [of the building under study] with people who were unfamiliar with the project, and we received additional feedback. We were successful in user testing the display, communicating the story behind the scarf and the level of engagement.

The positive outcome was working with a collaborative team. There was a level of freedom to user test to make sure we were on the right track. There was no one saying, “We do it this way” or “We don’t do that.” The feedback we received from the user testers provided us with interesting and unexpected information. I was able to see user testing implemented and its benefits.

1 What orientation of the images tell the story.



We wanted to know the following:

What series of images are they drawn to first?

Does the user start from the left and go to the right?

Recreate the story?

Explain why did they place the images vertically or horizontally

Conclusion

The Design Study Immersion Week projects are primarily centered on the opportunities created for Fjord as a learning company and for Parsons students in the Design and Technology MFA Program to gain professional service design experience. The contradiction and paradox that comes with the need for ambidexterity in Fjord's exploitative and exploration endeavors that propel the company further revealed itself as a great opportunity for Parsons students as they learn about the research and prototyping processes in a service design company. The short timeline and use of behavioral exploration research areas outside of client work simplify the engagement for the company as it removes potential confidentiality issues. These weekly design project challenges also encourage teams to think outside the day-to-day studio interactions and find new ways to explore. Placing Parsons students into this open exploration brings fresh thinking to the Fjord team members and allows the student to see more established service design methods. It also grants the student an opportunity to quickly connect with a working design team, which is often difficult to do in longer internship programs.

For Fjord, the benefits of Design Studies are clear. There are new insights attached to existing and emerging human behaviors that promote positive change. These insights become rationale for the ways Fjord designs new products and services for clients, thereby creating an opportunity for Fjord to turn employee's "bench" or idle time into paid services. Engaging students in the process ensures Fjord applies fresh methods and thinking. Reciprocally, the students benefit from immersion in a professional setting where they can experience the full spectrum of service design and human-centered research processes; these range from asking provocative questions, to developing prototypes and experiments,

to performing user-tests, to gaining insights that generate new knowledge about human behavior.

At Parsons, the future “dream” for this immersion process would be for the Design and Technology graduate students to have four or five of these experiences with different companies in a variety of industries. The Immersion Program experiences are valuable as a way to learn and teach from research studies that then can become the currency of an innovation company.

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Resumen: Desde 2015, *Fjord and Parsons School of Design* han estado colaborando para crear una alternativa mutuamente beneficiosa para el sistema de pasantías, al sumergir a los estudiantes de posgrado en Diseño y Tecnología en los Estudios de Diseño Inmersivo de Fjord, durante una semana. Los Estudios de Diseño en Fjord operan desde el trabajo directo con el cliente y son un vehículo perfecto para involucrar a los estudiantes en la investigación de diseño estructurado, centrado en el ser humano. La misión del programa de inmersión Fjord / Parsons es influir en el futuro del diseño, dar forma a los futuros diseñadores y propulsar la innovación en el diseño de servicios de Fjord. Para los estudiantes de Parsons, la experiencia como miembros contribuyentes de un equipo de diseño de servicios es un beneficio inusual. Mientras que los programas de pasantías tradicionales

de meses pueden ser una carga para los recursos de la compañía o una experiencia de aprendizaje improductiva para los estudiantes, el Programa de inmersión Fjord / Parsons es una excelente oportunidad y una alternativa de capacitación para involucrar a los estudiantes en un trabajo significativo, logrando así una investigación valiosa de diseño para Fjord. Este documento analiza seis casos de estudiantes graduados de Parsons que se beneficiaron con este programa.

Palabras clave: Repensando pasantías - práctica de diseño - investigación de diseño - pensamiento de diseño - estudio de diseño - diseño de servicios.

Resumo: Desde 2015, a Fjord e a Parsons School of Design têm colaborado para criar uma alternativa mutuamente benéfica ao sistema de estágio, ao imergir estudantes de pós-graduação em Design e Tecnologia nos Immersive Design Studios da Fjord por uma semana. Os Estudos de Design no Fjord operam a partir do trabalho direto com o cliente e são um veículo perfeito para envolver os alunos em pesquisas de design estruturado, centradas no ser humano. A missão do programa de imersão Fjord / Parsons é influenciar o futuro do design, moldar futuros designers e impulsionar a inovação no projeto dos serviços da Fjord. Para os alunos da Parsons, a experiência como membros contribuintes de uma equipe de design de serviço é um benefício incomum. Embora os programas tradicionais de estágio de meses possam ser um fardo para os recursos da empresa ou uma experiência de aprendizado improductiva para os alunos, o Programa de Imersão Fjord / Parsons é uma excelente oportunidade e um treinamento alternativo para envolver os alunos. em um trabalho significativo, conseguindo assim uma valiosa pesquisa de design para a Fjord. Este documento analisa seis casos de estudantes de pós-graduação da Parsons que se beneficiaram deste programa.

Palavras chave: Repensar estágios - prática de design - pesquisa de design - design thinking - estudo de design - design de serviços.

[Las traducciones de los abstracts fueron supervisadas por el autor de cada artículo]
