A recent collaboration between Interior Systems Inc. (ISI) and UW-Stout’s department of art and design enabled the university’s interior design students to gain real life experience in an event titled “Design Charrette.”

“This event was an interesting and intense brainstorming session to generate concepts for a ‘real world’ project,” ISI is working on, providing students a chance to work with professional designers and UW-Stout design staff in an intense two-day workshop,” said Ron Verdon, chair of UW-Stout’s department of art and design.

ISI designs interiors for commercial and educational settings. The Fond du Lac interior design firm has strong ties to UW-Stout. Lindsey Bovinet, CEO of ISI, is a Stout graduate and received the university’s “Outstanding Young Alumni Award” in 1987. According to Bovinet, ISI set out to present a workshop that would complement the students’ academic experience with real life experience.

“We wanted to show students what they will actually be doing when they get a job, so they are better prepared,” explained Bovinet. “An experience like this has a profound way of demonstrating to interior design students how the basics, such as drawing, painting, sculpture, printmaking, graphic design and ceramics, are critical in preparing them for a career.”

ISI contributed a tremendous amount of support for the “Design Charrette,” providing the expertise of Bovinet, creative director Kari Muener, and designers Linda Ahern and Rita Gear. They also supplied materials, a catered lunch and reception, honorable mention awards and a $500 cash award for the first-place group.

Students were divided into teams of three. Maureen Mitten and Marc Kallsen, UW-Stout’s department of art and design, selected the team members based on qualifications, distributing expertise equally. According to Verdon, this process created teams made up of individuals who were somewhat unfamiliar with each other and emphasized the teamwork approach, which is quite common in today’s workplace.

On the first day of the “Design Charrette,” students participated in a series of short creative workshops inspiring them to come up with resourceful ideas to solve design problems in a brief period of time. “In business there is never enough time—deadlines must always be met,” Bovinet said. “The charrette experience teaches students the enormous amount of work they are capable of doing in a compressed period of time. When a student accomplishes several weeks of work in one day, that has a powerful impact on their self-confidence.” At the end of the day, ISI challenged the students to design the reception area and conference room complex for their offices in Fond du Lac.

After receiving the floor plan and perspective outline the following morning, each group developed a design and materials presentation. The groups then had 10 minutes to present their ideas to a jury. Members of the first-place group were Jyneal Radke, Alana Skoyen and Raquel Schwieder.

“One of the things I think we all felt good about was that the students really engaged in the process. They did a wonderful job and were resourceful,” Verdon said.

The designers at ISI actually saw some student ideas they plan to implement. “Our desire was to get fresh creative ideas,” Bovinet explained. “That is exactly what we received and more. All of the teams, not just the winning team, really pushed their thinking out of the box to come up with some outstanding solutions to the design problem.”

Verdon said ISI was well prepared for the event. “It was clear they spent a great deal of time consulting their associates and interns, so that they were sensitive to the students’ needs and concerns. What they presented was interesting, realistic and narrowed enough in focus to fit the time frame,” he explained.

According to Bovinet, the ISI designers enjoyed being instructors. “I am a firm believer that when you teach you learn twice,” he said. “Our designers are very proficient at what they do, but sometimes they lose perspective on just how talented they really are. Being able to share their talents with young energetic learners gave our designers a new sense of self worth. During the sessions with students, I just stood back and watched them work and was very proud of them all.”

UW-Stout actively seeks arrangements with area business and industry that are mutually beneficial. “This was a rare opportunity for Stout’s students and staff. This project is an ideal example of how UW-Stout cooperatively engages practicing professionals in the educational setting,” Verdon said.

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