


A Program Evaluation of  
*Design Directions*  
At the Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

In the spring of 2004, Dorothy Dunn, then-director of education at the Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum (CHNDM), asked the Smithsonian Office of Policy and Analysis (OP&A) to conduct a study of the Cooper-Hewitt's design education program for underserved New York City high school students, Design Directions. The study was to include a history and overview of the program, an evaluation of its processes and performance, and suggestions for possible improvements.

Between the spring and fall of 2004, OP&A study team members observed several sessions of Design Directions and other CHNDM education programs; reviewed information from background documents provided by the education department (including foundation proposals, memoranda, annual evaluative data, program promotional literature, budgets, administrative records, and other materials); and conducted dozens of interviews with designers, students, funders, program partners, and CHNDM staff, managers, and board members.

## **STRENGTHS**

Design Directions gives high school students an opportunity to work with top design professionals in a series of free educational offerings. The program

- Provides a unique opportunity for disadvantaged New York City high school students to learn about design from world-class designers;
- Offers participants the chance to develop both specific design skills and general life/career skills through engaging activities;
- Gives participants a first-hand taste of different areas of design;
- Provides interested students with tools (skills, connections, inside information, and personal mentoring) that can ease their entry into a design career.

Design Directions also serves participating designers well, giving them

- A chance to share their passion for design with young people;
- The opportunity to establish ties with the National Design Museum, with the valuable connections and recognition that this entails;
- A chance to work through design ideas with a “youth focus group.”

Moreover, the program has value as part of the museum’s efforts to reach out to new audiences that have not traditionally been part of its visitor base.

## **CHALLENGES**

The feedback the study team received from program participants was overwhelmingly positive. Nonetheless, the team did identify some challenges for the program, which can be loosely grouped into three areas: strategic planning, management, and resources.

### **Strategic Planning**

#### ***Program Goals***

The goals of Design Directions have always been vague. As a result, the program’s planning and evolution have been somewhat arbitrary. The study team sees three dimensions in which the goals of the program need to be clarified:

- The balance between serving students and serving designers;

- The relative priorities of the various goals for students (encouraging careers in design; developing general life and career skills; raising social awareness; and so on); and
- The relative priorities of the various goals for designers (providing designers with an outlet for charitable impulses; giving them a chance to form mutually-beneficial ties to the museum; and so on).

**Recommendation: A formal, detailed statement of goals for the program should be drafted with input from diverse stakeholders in the education department, the museum, the schools, and the design and funder communities.**

### *Relationship to the Museum*

The study team heard conflicting comments on the question of where education programs fall on the Cooper-Hewitt's list of programmatic priorities. The museum's strategic plan does include language about the importance of educational programs, and senior managers have stressed the centrality of education in the museum's mission. Yet some interviewees (including some board members) argued that the museum's *practical* commitment to education did not match the rhetoric, that education is sometimes short-changed for resources, and that the current focus on expanding the museum's facilities is likely to further weaken support for the museum's educational mission.

**Recommendation: Supporters of education on the CHNDM board should engage fellow board members and senior management in a frank discussion of their concerns about the museum's commitment to its education programs, and its use of these programs as a vehicle for gaining increased national prominence.**

## **Management**

### *Tracking Students*

Information that might allow for judgments about the long-run outcomes of participation in Design Directions is sparse, scattered, and largely anecdotal. This has much to do with the current approach to tracking former students, which is highly informal. A more systematic approach to tracking students and collecting evidence on their post-program activities would have a number of potential benefits. For example, a contact list of individuals who might be willing to contribute to the program's continued success could be compiled. Further, the information gathered would be of interest both to other institutions that might wish to model programs on Design Directions, and to funders that require program evaluations.

**Recommendation: The education department should maintain a reasonably accurate, periodically updated contact list of students who have completed an**

agreed-upon number of hours of offerings, and should strive to keep track of these students for several years after high school graduation.

**Recommendation:** The education department should make an effort to contact students who attend a single Design Directions offering and do not return for others, and those who begin but fail to complete multi-session offerings, to ascertain why they chose not to return.

### *Targeting Disadvantaged Youth*

Serving disadvantaged New York City youth is the program's *raison d'être*. Currently, the education department does not collect data on students (such as approximate household income) that would make it possible to judge where the benefits of the program are going, in socio-economic terms.<sup>1</sup> Focusing outreach efforts on schools in economically disadvantaged neighborhoods appears to be the main tool for targeting disadvantaged youth, but word of the program has diffused more generally, and some program participants are not disadvantaged. Because one of the justifications for the program turns on its effectiveness in reaching underserved youth, measures to ensure (and demonstrate) that its benefits flow predominantly to this group may be required.

**Recommendation:** The education department should collect additional data—including approximate household income, ethnicity, household composition, and so on—from students.

### *Record Keeping*

Compiling databases on Design Directions offerings and designers, as well as reconstructing historical expenditure and funding information, entailed consulting multiple hard-copy documents that nonetheless left gaps and uncertainties. Information on the earlier years of the program under the first program coordinator was particularly hard to come by. Basic record-keeping is a crucial element of institutional memory, and a necessary foundation for effective management, organizational learning, and accountability, and should be undertaken systematically.

**Recommendation:** Complete basic records on the program's finances, offerings, and designer contacts should be maintained in a consistent and transparent format. Records should be easily accessible in electronic as well as hard-copy form.

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<sup>1</sup> These comments do not apply to the Van Lier Fellowship program, as the Van Lier students are selected by and work closely with the Design Directions coordinator.



### *Outreach and Recruiting*

The main tool for student outreach is the semi-annual recruiting poster, which is mailed to approximately 6,500 schools, organizations, and individuals. However, beyond this, the issue of precisely how student outreach efforts are planned, organized, and conducted remains somewhat unclear to the study team, especially in the case of school visits. Further, program information on the CHNDM website is sparse, and no Web-based student outreach efforts currently exist; these are potentially serious shortcomings, given the reliance young people place on the Web as a source of information.

Outreach efforts to designers also appeared somewhat *ad hoc*. Much of the program's outreach to designers was done through word of mouth and personal contacts, which limits the number of designers who are informed about the program, and does not give an equal chance of access to all members of the New York design community.

**Recommendation: The education department should establish a database of local high schools, with information that would allow their systematic prioritization for outreach efforts (such as number of students, demographics of the geographic area served, and existing visual arts programs).**

**Recommendation: The education and communication departments should consider how they might use the unique resources of the Web to boost outreach efforts to students and designers.**

**Recommendation: The education department should organize and maintain a database of designers and design firms in the New York City area, and assemble a promotional kit for outreach mailings to selected recipients.**

### *Planning Offerings*

One issue that came up repeatedly in interviews was the question of the trade-off between “depth” and “reach” in the program's educational offerings. Should Design Directions seek to reach a large number of young people in a relatively superficial way? Or should it try to have a greater impact on a smaller number of students?

It is not possible to say which approach would more effectively achieve the program's goals, in the absence of a more explicit statement of what those goals *are*, and in the absence of information on long-run outcomes. However, several education department staff members raised the possibility that the program might indeed benefit from shifting resources toward intensive work with a smaller number of committed students. One reason for this was the frustration repeatedly voiced about the lack of commitment exhibited by some of the more casual program participants.

**Recommendation: In the short term, and in view of the statement of goals discussed above, the education department should consider introducing a higher level of**

screening or selectivity into the application process—and perhaps a set of formal rules governing attendance as well—to weed out students who are unlikely to participate seriously.

### *Training and Guidance for Designers*

Designers teaching their first Design Directions offering do not receive systematic guidance on the “dos and don’ts” of program pedagogy, or on the goals and objectives of the program. Instead, such guidance is provided through informal channels such as discussions and e-mail exchanges with the program coordinator. Such an informal system can leave gaps in the information received concerning how to conduct an offering. Further, it can result in inefficiency in the use of the program coordinator’s time: written guidelines distributed to *all* new program instructors could answer many questions that might otherwise have to be discussed in separate exchanges with *each* of them.

**Recommendation: The education department should assemble an orientation kit for designers doing their first Design Directions offerings, and possibly offer an orientation session.**

## **Resource Issues**

### *Human Resources*

Many of the program’s shortcomings can be attributed at least in part to staffing issues, such as lack of clarity about staff roles and responsibilities, inadequate accountability, and lack of coordination (and in some cases cooperation) among staff.

Further, education department interviewees indicated that the decision by senior management to eliminate the schools programs assistant position in FY2002 left the department short on administrative support—a dilemma that is still felt today, and has been alleviated only by an awkward informal sharing of the Design Directions program assistant’s time.

**Recommendation: A part-time program assistant should be hired immediately to undertake routine administrative tasks.**

**Recommendation: The duties of the program assistant shared between the Design Directions coordinator and schools programs coordinator should be clearly defined, and adjusted to reflect actual resources allocated from the Design Directions budget.**

### *Financial Resources*

Design Directions is heavily dependent upon annual grant funding, in particular from the Altman Foundation. The study team believes that if the museum wishes to make a firm commitment to the program, other sources of funds for it should be found. In this connection, several board members mentioned their hopes of establishing a separate endowment for education programs.

**Recommendation: Board members who support education should continue efforts to establish a separate endowment for Cooper-Hewitt education programs.**



## INTRODUCTION

In the spring of 2004, Dorothy Dunn, head of the education department at the Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum (CHNDM) at the time, asked the Smithsonian Office of Policy and Analysis (OP&A) to conduct a study of the Cooper-Hewitt's design education program for underserved New York City youth, Design Directions.<sup>2</sup> The study was to include a concise history and overview of the program, an evaluation of its processes and performance, and suggestions for possible improvements. One reason for the interest in such a study was that despite its relative longevity, Design Directions is not well known or understood by many of its stakeholders, including members of the New York design community, potential funders, and CHNDM staff and board members.

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<sup>2</sup> In this report, the terms “underserved,” “at-risk,” and “disadvantaged” are used interchangeably to describe Design Directions’ target audience.

A structured assessment of the program's processes and performance had not previously been undertaken. However, this is neither surprising nor unusual. Formal evaluation of education programs is not a standard practice at most museums, although it is increasingly being introduced at the behest of funders.<sup>3</sup> Further, informal evaluative efforts by education department staff have been hampered by *ad hoc* processes, time pressures, staff turnover, and a lack resources and expertise.

Some of the information required for this evaluation existed prior to the research for this study. Evaluation forms are distributed to participants at the end of each program offering. Slides, photographs, and video documentation capture the dynamics of the program. And details of the program's evolution, administration, and offerings can be found in internal education department documents, grant proposals, and outreach brochures. However, the available information is dispersed, fragmented, and in many cases lacking the details that permit a disciplined analytical approach.

The evaluation team set forth the following purposes:

- To examine whether and how well Design Directions' goals are being met;
- To identify areas of strength and weakness in the program's educational offerings;
- To identify areas of strength and weakness in the program's administration;
- To provide feedback on, and suggest improvements in, the processes by which the program seeks to attain its goals;
- To determine the plausibility of rolling out the program or parts of the program nationally;

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<sup>3</sup> See the OP&A report, *The Evaluation of Museum Educational Programs: A National Perspective*, March 2004. Available online at [www.si.edu/opanda/Reports/EducationPrograms.pdf](http://www.si.edu/opanda/Reports/EducationPrograms.pdf).

- To encourage a probing, critical attitude among education department staff toward the program, and to foster a commitment to ongoing refinement;
- To facilitate the exchange of information about Design Directions within the education department, the museum, and the Smithsonian as a whole—as well as among other program stakeholders such as funders, designers, CHNDM board members, and the wider museum education community.

The larger purpose of this study is also linked to fostering accountability and organizational learning within the education department and museum.

In the past, *accountability* has been demonstrated largely through periodic progress and expenditure reports. But increasingly, managers, boards, and funders are interested in assessing program outputs and outcomes, and seek to hold program staff responsible for these, as well as for honest and competent administration. In other words, the concept of accountability is widening to include concern for the impacts of programs—that is, what organizations are accomplishing with their monies and efforts.

This study represents an effort to foster *organizational learning* by summarizing existing information on the program, presenting findings from the study team’s own qualitative research (including dozens of interviews with staff, designers, students, funders, program partners, and board members), and generating recommendations.

The report is organized as follows:

The “Findings” section collects the relevant facts about the past and present of Design Directions under the following sub-headings:

- Program Overview and History;
- The Institutional Environment;

- Educational Offerings;
- Students;
- Designers;
- Resources (Financial, Human, and Space);
- Miscellaneous Findings.

The second major section, “Conclusions,” draws out the implications of the “Findings” section in a series of observations about the strengths and weaknesses of the program in its current form.

The third section, “Recommendations,” offers suggestions for changes that would build on strengths and remedy weaknesses identified in the “Conclusions” section.

## **Methodology**

Before moving on to substantive issues, a brief discussion of the methodology used for this study—and its limitations—is in order.

The research process for this study involved several steps. Preparatory steps consisted of gathering background information on the program; holding preliminary discussions with staff; deciding upon the appropriate sets of multidisciplinary skills needed to conduct a useful study; and determining whether the study could be undertaken at this point. Initial research questions were formulated, designed to examine important aspects of the program and to solicit feedback from diverse stakeholders.

After designing the study and setting forth the questions, the team obtained background documents from the CHNDM education department, including foundation proposals, staff memoranda, annual evaluative data (student questionnaires), program promotional literature, budgets, administrative records, and other materials. The team also reviewed literature on design programs aimed at high school students and on the evaluation of education programs.

Members of the research team collected qualitative data by attending several Design Directions offerings. During these visits, the team informally discussed the activities and the program in general with students and designers, as well as taking notes on students' behavior and reactions. Members of the study team also attended sessions of the related CHNDM education program A City of Neighborhoods<sup>4</sup> in Washington DC and the 2004 CHNDM Summer Design Institute (SDI)<sup>5</sup> for educators in New York City, and observed a presentation by education department staff at the 2004 Smithsonian Affiliates conference in Washington DC in which CHNDM education programs were presented and discussed with the audience.

In addition to informal discussions with individuals in the venues noted above, the study team conducted semi-structured face-to-face and telephone interviews with selected students, designers, funders, program partners, and CHNDM board members, senior managers, and staff. These provided valuable insights and raised important issues. (A list of interviewees is provided in Appendix A.)

Because data were collected by three individuals, team meetings were held to triangulate data, discuss findings, build chains of evidence, draw conclusions, and arrive at

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<sup>4</sup> A City of Neighborhoods is program for K-12 teachers that takes participants into urban neighborhoods to work with community members and design professionals on design solutions to community issues—for example, transforming an abandoned lot into a public park or an unused structure into a community center. The goal is for participating teachers to use this experience as a model for developing their own classes that combine design and architecture with awareness of community issues. Program sessions have been held in several cities across the United States, as well as New York City.

<sup>5</sup> SDI is an annual program that invites design educators from across the nation to come to New York City to participate in a week-long series of discussions and workshops exploring design education for K-12 students.



recommendations. Where issues of fact remained unclear, the study team consulted with CHNDM staff members or others in a position to clarify these issues. Where uncertainty remains, this is noted in the text.

## **Limitations**

Evaluation requires trained personnel, money, time, and access to relevant information. (Generally, evaluations of educational initiatives cost between 5 percent and 15 percent of a program's annual operating budget.) Because OP&A is a part of the Smithsonian Institution's central analytical capability, money was less of a consideration.<sup>6</sup> Time, however, was an issue; because of OP&A's busy schedule and limited staff, several months were required to process data.

Much of the data requested by the OP&A study team was not readily available, or available only in scattered fragments. As the team discovered shortly after the initiation of the project, data had not been collected systematically in several areas of interest, nor had formal responsibility for data collection and record keeping been assigned. Thus, obtaining time series data on the program's offerings, participants, funding, and planned allocations posed problems, and in some cases, the study team simply had to work with data that was unclear, incomplete, or inconsistent. Although conversations and e-mail exchanges with CHNDM staff facilitated the team's qualitative understanding of the program, rigorous analysis of certain elements of the program was not possible.

One particular concern was that the sample of students to which the OP&A study team had access was relatively small, and limited to current and recent program participants. (There appears to have been a break in record-keeping after the first Design Directions program coordinator departed in 2001.) The team did not have the resources, time, or expertise to track down alumni from throughout the lifetime of the program. To further complicate matters, most of the students contacted from lists provided by the education

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<sup>6</sup> Units are charged only for travel and other direct expenses, not for staff time, which generally constitutes the largest percentage of evaluation costs.

department did not respond to requests for interviews; and on more than one occasion, education department staff expressed a preference that the study team *not* formally interview students at offerings that team members attended.

As a result, information pertaining to the program's impact on participants is largely anecdotal. Indeed, even with better tracking, evaluating this impact would pose considerable challenges. For example, discerning whether changes in attitude and behavior among alumni are due to participation in Design Directions—rather than to natural maturation and other influences—is not a straightforward matter.

Another principal concern was the inability of the study team to develop a deep understanding of the context or environment of the students. While team members formed a general impression of students' social, economic, and educational environments, they were unable to visit students' homes, schools, and neighborhoods. Issues of practicality and logistics dictated that interviews be conducted at sites where program offerings occurred or on the telephone.

Finally, the Design Directions program coordinator at times was unresponsive to requests for data and seemed resistant to the program evaluation process. This may have been because of a lack of experience with evaluators, difficulties in balancing such requests with her primary workload, misunderstandings about the purpose of the study, or any number of other reasons.



## FINDINGS

### Program History and Overview

Design Directions offers high school students the opportunity to work with top designers and design educators in a series of free educational offerings that develop students' creative and problem-solving skills, and help participating students on the path towards higher education and careers in design. These offerings include one-day intensive workshops (Design Days), multi-session workshops (Design Studios), portfolio workshops, college visits, studio/site visits, peer-to-peer tours of Cooper-Hewitt exhibitions, and Van Lier Fellowships, which each year give seven New York City high school students the chance to work in paid design internships and to participate in other activities that assist them on the path to design careers. Aside from the Van Lier program, admission to Design Directions offerings is on a first-come, first-served basis. Students are able to pick and choose the offerings in which they have an interest.

## **Program History**

The establishment of Design Directions as a separate program with its own coordinator, grant funding, and full schedule of offerings dates to 1998. The Cooper-Hewitt education department provided workshops for high school students similar to Design Directions offerings for several years before then, but these were not integrated into a single overarching program.

The program was conceived and initiated mainly by three individuals: Dorothy Dunn; the 1997-98 Morse fellow in the education department, Nell Daniel; and the CHNDM schools programs manager at the time of the program's inception, Kerry MacIntosh.<sup>7</sup> In the mid-1990s, the schools programs side of the department had been offering a series of highly successful day-long design workshops for New York City high school students. At the time Daniel was doing her Morse Fellowship, the idea of developing these into an integrated high school design education program arose. With her academic background in adolescent education and diversity, Daniel assisted Dunn and MacIntosh in writing a grant proposal to the Altman Foundation to fund such a program. This proposal was successful, and Daniel was hired as full-time staff to serve as coordinator for the new program, now known as Design Directions.

In its first years as a separate program, Design Directions' growth—in terms of funding, offerings, students, and visibility in the museum and design education communities—was rapid. According to one interviewee, an important reason for this was that education programs for underserved adolescents were particularly popular in the donor community in the late 1990s and early 2000s: “When you sat down with funders and read them your list of programs, the second you said ‘urban youth directly served,’ that was what they wanted.” Another reason was the sheer energy and drive of the program coordinator and

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<sup>7</sup> The Morse Fellow program is a sponsored fellowship in partnership with Teachers College of Columbia University, through which a Columbia graduate student works on a specific education project with the CHNDM education department for a period of one year.

the education department staff, who had great, if somewhat vaguely defined, ambitions for Design Directions.

By fiscal year (FY)1999,<sup>8</sup> with the support of the Altman Foundation, Design Directions was providing four types of educational offerings that continue to be mainstays of the program: multi-session *Design Studios*, single-session *Design Days*, *college visits*, and *studio/site visits*.<sup>9</sup> In FY2000, a *portfolio workshop* and an *internship program* were added to the offerings.

Although no new types of offerings were introduced in FY2001, the program's rapid growth continued into that year. The total number of offerings jumped from 15 to 20, and total hours rose from 78 to 167. Reflecting on that time, one staff member recalled, "Money at that point was no problem. Foundations were calling up and asking, do you want \$10,000?" The program's funding was sufficient to allow the department to hire a full-time program assistant for Design Directions.

In the early years of the program, department staff also devoted a great deal of time and effort to establishing relationships with designers, partner organizations, schools, and community groups that Design Directions continues to draw upon today. Interviewees agreed that Daniel and Dunn were particularly adept at this task.

However, the program's rapid expansion came to a halt in FY2002, when the 9/11 terrorist attacks led to the cancellation or postponement of several scheduled offerings and Daniel resigned, leaving the CHNDM schools programs manager (Monica Hampton, who replaced MacIntosh in 1999) to administer the program for the better part of a year until a new Design Directions program coordinator was brought on board. An interviewee speculated that Daniel's departure may have been, at least in part, a

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<sup>8</sup> In this report, data for the spring and summer offerings in a given calendar year is combined with data from fall offerings from the previous year, to reflect the "academic semester" character of the program and to follow funding cycles. Thus, for example, FY2004 covers the fall 2003 and spring 2004 Design Directions semesters, plus summer 2004.

<sup>9</sup> For a description of these offerings see "Program Offerings" section. That section also contains a table and diagrams that provide more information on the growth in Design Directions offerings since FY1999.

consequence of the museum's decision to rein in the growth of Design Directions, which was creating some tensions within the education department and the museum:

[Nell] wanted to start a satellite Design Directions program, rent space separate from the museum, and really up the ante on what we could offer. We were talking about doing study tours to Europe. These things were great, but I don't think the museum was ready to do them when there were so many other initiatives that needed a strong platform. ... The rest of us would say, "What about SDI? What about adult programs?" I won't say there was jealousy—we had hit upon something funders were attracted to, and you had to be happy about that. But it was an unequal balance.

Documents obtained from the education department and interviews with department staff suggest that the period between Daniel's departure and the arrival of a new program coordinator was a difficult time for Design Directions. In addition to the repercussions of 9/11 and the loss of Daniel, both the Design Directions program assistant and Hampton's schools programs assistant resigned around this time. With a reduced support staff, Hampton struggled with the burdens of administering Design Directions and hiring new staff, in addition to her existing responsibilities. During this period, no major innovations in the program took place, except that in summer 2002, Design Directions students were given the opportunity to attend SDI sessions.

To add to the difficulties, the museum's senior management decided at this time to eliminate the schools programs assistant position, leaving a gap in support staff that continues to be felt. The practical upshot has been that responsibilities formerly associated with two support staff positions (the Design Directions program assistant and the schools programs assistant) are now combined in a single position (the Design Directions program assistant).

Design Directions began a new phase in May 2002 with the arrival of a new program coordinator, Bonnie Harris. Under Harris's direction, some elements of the program were modified and some innovations introduced, but the basic structure of offerings has remained intact. Among the changes has been a more conscious focus on staying within the New York City schools community and targeting underserved kids. In 2003, Design Directions introduced several new types of offerings: the *Van Lier Fellowship* (which replaced the less-structured internships previously offered); *Directions* peer-to-peer

exhibition tours; and the summer *Design Lab* opposite SDI.<sup>10</sup> Also added was an open house for students, parents, and teachers that serves as an introduction and orientation session for the Design Directions program.

The question of program growth since FY2001 is not straightforward. New types of offerings have been introduced, and in terms of total hours of offerings, Design Directions is now slightly above its FY2001 level. However, total hours of Design Days and Design Studios, which still comprise the backbone of the program's educational offerings, remain below FY2001 levels—in the case of Design Studios, far below. Hours of studio/site visits are higher than in FY2001; hours of college visits are lower.

Overall, the study team would summarize the development of the program as:

- A period of rapid growth under the first coordinator (FY1999-FY2001);
- Some retrenchment and a struggle to maintain the program during the interim between program coordinators (FY2002); and
- Recovery and resumed innovation (in terms of new types of offerings) but little overall increase from FY2001 levels (in terms of total hours of offerings) under the second program coordinator (FY2002-FY2005).

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<sup>10</sup> Unlike “Design Days” and “Design Studios,” “Design Lab” is not a formal title. This title was suggested by a CHNDM staffer and is used here in lieu of such a formal designation.

## The Institutional Environment

The Cooper-Hewitt's newly generated strategic vision notes that the current challenge for the museum is

[T]o position the Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum as the design authority of the United States and to communicate its pre-eminence as an historic and contemporary design museum on the international stage.

The strategic focus is upon expanding the influence of the Cooper-Hewitt to make it a truly *national* presence in the design community. The museum's education programs—aimed at high school students, educators, undergraduate, graduate, and post-graduate students, and the general public—support this vision by introducing the world of design to wider audiences in New York City and across the nation, as well as developing important relationships with the design community.

To get a sense of how the education department is viewed in the context of this vision, the team asked interviewees several questions about the organizational context:

- What is the museum's philosophy toward education?
- Is the philosophy clearly spelled out?
- Where does education rank on the museum's list of priorities?
- Are policies, organizational structures, roles and responsibilities, and interfaces among educational staff and other museum staff clear?
- Has the education department's degree of autonomy been set forth?
- Have fundraising boundaries been established?



- Are decisions that affect the education department transparent?

When the study team asked museum staff to discuss these topics, many were unable to come up with clear answers, or explain how education fits into the museum's larger purpose. This does not mean that these issues are considered unimportant, but it does suggest that issues concerning interdepartmental relationships and the role of education have not been explicitly thought through and articulated.

### **The Role and Priority of Education**

One interviewee, an educator at another prominent Manhattan museum, noted that senior museum managers typically do not fully appreciate the role of education programs at their institutions:

You're lucky if you have a director who *gets it*, who understands what education is all about. [At my institution,] we have to struggle to remind [senior management] that the reason you have so many people coming here who would not otherwise come is because of education. Education provides that bridge to all those people who think "Museums are not for me; I'm not smart enough."

This interviewee went on to express a belief that the Cooper-Hewitt was no exception to this general rule. Several other interviewees agreed that the director at times seems ambivalent about education, and believed he had not succeeded in clearly articulating to the museum community the purpose and importance of education programs, or their relationship to other museum programs. However, others disagreed, judging that the director supported education strongly and fully appreciated its role in the museum's strategy to build a national presence. The director himself emphasized to the study team the importance that he places upon education.

The study team was particularly interested in the views of board members who have worked to set the museum's priorities for the future. Several board members expressed a commitment to education that was palpable, even passionate. Among these, Cooper Hewitt's educational programs were seen as one of the museum's great strengths, and a

powerful asset in its push for a higher national profile. The following comment captures this view:

Our education department has a reputation in New York as one of the best museum education programs in the city. If you had say what it is about the museum that makes it *really good*, the education department would definitely be one of those things. This puts the Cooper-Hewitt in a position to be a national leader in design education.

Another education booster on the board contended, “Educational outreach is the signature of the museum. It is the *key differentiator* between Cooper Hewitt and similar institutions.” Yet another noted, “The things we do the best are education programs. That’s the horse we need to ride to the national rodeo.”

However, several board members expressed concern over the status of education at the Cooper-Hewitt, arguing that when push comes to shove, education is often short-changed for resources. (In fairness, it should be noted that complaints from educators and their supporters about museums’ practical commitment to education are common throughout the museum world.) They were particularly concerned that the current emphasis on the \$75-million renovation and expansion of the Carnegie mansion will divert attention and resources from the museum’s educational mission, even if education retains a prominent place in strategic plans and museum rhetoric. As a way to counter this, one board member discussed the possibility of establishing a separate endowment fund specifically earmarked for education programs.

All board members interviewed mentioned that the education department would benefit not only from meaningful collaborations with other departments within the museum, but from greater interchange with the Smithsonian-wide education community. Several specifically discussed the need for Smithsonian leadership to build a network of educators that shares best practices, leverages resources, convenes conferences, and draws in players from outside the Institution.

## **Interdepartmental Relationships**

Interviewees talked about boundaries, insularity, hurdles, differences, identity, turf, and individually-oriented accomplishments within and among departments. Some observed that the culture of the museum emphasizes functional and occupational identifications that reinforce the insularity of departments, create competition rather than cooperation, and make it difficult for staff to relate their jobs to the interests of the organization as a whole.

Interviewees attributed the problem to cultural values rooted in the history of the museum (although by no means confined to the Cooper-Hewitt), according to which curatorial values dominate. As one interviewee put it, “design for design’s sake” is the underlying philosophy, and this translates into a somewhat elitist approach of “the design world talking to the design world”—a situation into which educational outreach fits uneasily.

Some interviewees also blamed the fragmented state of interdepartmental relationships on senior management. They noted senior managers have not successfully promoted internal communication, engaged staff in understanding the interrelated roles of different departments, or invested time in building bridges among personnel. Others noted that the director has made personnel changes but has not provided guidance on how new approaches and practices fit together, nor has he clarified roles.

In particular, the study team saw some evidence of friction between the development office and the education department concerning independent efforts to raise funds by the latter. Some interviewees on the education side saw this as a case of uncooperative turf protection by development staff, and believed the education department should be free to pursue its own funds from organizations with an educational focus. However, a senior CHNDM manager pointed out a legitimate concern behind the development office position: that uncoordinated fundraising by individual departments could lead to an awkward situation in which a single funder is approached by multiple representatives of the museum, asking for different things. (This is a particular concern for Smithsonian

museums, where uncoordinated fundraising by individual *units* raises the same concern at the Institutional level.) This interviewee suggested that what was needed was more constructive communication and engagement between the two departments, rather than unhelpful accusations of turf protection.

### **Education Department Structure and Programs**

The range of programs offered by the CHNDM education department is wide, encompassing programs for both adults and school children: lectures, studio visits, study tours, exhibition-related symposia and panels, guided tours for school groups and adults, the City of Neighborhoods and Summer Design Institute (SDI) programs for design educators, and more. Within the department, a schools programs manager, public programs manager, and special programs manager separately report to the department head. Design Directions occupies a unique niche within this organizational structure. Alone among Cooper-Hewitt schools programs, Design Directions has its own full-time coordinator. (For more on formal relationships within the department, see the “Human Resources” section below.)

Links exist between Design Directions and some of the other major Cooper-Hewitt schools programs. In the case of the City of Neighborhoods program, the connection dates to 2002. The link between the two programs is simple and clear: City of Neighborhoods Design Directions offerings represent the *direct* application to high school audiences of the pedagogical approaches presented in City of Neighborhoods programs for instructors.

A connection also exists between Design Directions and SDI, but this is more of a work-in-progress. In summer 2002, Design Directions students were permitted to attend SDI sessions. The following year, Design Directions began to offer a one-week Design Lab intensive program concurrently with SDI, and loosely integrated with it. The 2004 session, observed by the study team, consisted of two design workshops modeled on Design Days (product design with Brand Jordan and a photography/collage activity with

the Los Angeles-based design firm Super Happy Bunny); a sketching tour of New York City sites such as Penn Station; a Directions tour of the museum; and a studio visit to the Chopping Block, a graphic and web design firm. Adult SDI participants were permitted to attend Design Lab sessions as observers as part of their program.

## **Mission and Goals**

While general statements of the program’s strategic goals abound, these nonetheless struck the study team as short on particulars. To the study team’s knowledge, there is no definitive written statement that spells out and prioritizes Design Directions’ overall goals.<sup>11</sup> The goals that implicitly guide the program are couched in general terms, and their operational implications are sometimes unclear. The team also noted a number of potential conflicts among the various goals mentioned for the program in education department documents and interviews.

First, the implicit assumption among most of the stakeholders interviewed by the study team was that students—especially underserved students—were the primary audience for Design Directions. However, some education department documents place similar emphasis on the program’s role in serving the design community, and some department staff agreed that serving adolescents and serving designers were both primary goals of the program, to be pursued side-by-side. While these goals are by no means mutually exclusive, the question of how they should be balanced does affect how offerings are planned and how resources are allocated in the program’s implementation.

Second, under the heading of “serving students,” the program simultaneously seeks to pursue several distinct goals: encouraging and equipping kids to pursue careers in design; developing general career, life, and problem-solving skills; raising social consciousness; promoting visual literacy; and introducing kids to cultural ideas and institutions. While these ends are related, they are not identical; and in some cases, they may conflict. For

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<sup>11</sup> This is not to say that goals for a particular time period have not been formulated in some detail on occasion. For example, Design Directions grant proposals typically lay out specific objectives for the coming year.

example, a workshop that emphasizes raising social consciousness may not be a particularly effective vehicle for preparing participants for careers in design.

Third, the program also remains somewhat unspecific in its goals vis-à-vis serving designers. Again, several distinct goals can be identified; and again, while these are generally complementary, this does not eliminate the need to carefully consider how they interrelate, how they might conflict, or what their relative priority should be. These goals include providing designers with fresh perspectives on design problems from creative young people; giving designers an informal consumer focus group to provide feedback on their own ideas; fostering mutually-beneficial ties between designers and the museum; providing a form of recognition or acknowledgement of designers' ideas; and so on. Like the goals relating to students, these have not been disentangled and prioritized, to provide clear guidance for planning.

More generally, the education department does not appear to have a written strategic plan into which Design Directions fits. One staff member interviewed expressed some frustration with this situation:

There *is* no strategy. I'd like to put the word "strategy" front and center right now, because that is what we lack. We lack a strategy in the department for the programs we administer, and it's not just Design Directions. We need to have a clear vision of who our audience is, and to intimately know what it takes to carry out a program and where to get the resources and people we need if we don't have them here. We need a stronger strategy, because without it, you are going to drive yourself crazy. The students might come, but it's random.

## **Educational Offerings**

Design Directions consists of eight different types of offerings:

- Design Days (one-day workshops);
- Design Studios (multiple-session workshops);
- College visits;
- Studio/site visits;
- Portfolio workshops;
- Internships/fellowships;
- Directions (peer-to-peer CHNDM exhibition tours);
- Design Lab, a week-long summer intensive program coordinated with SDI.

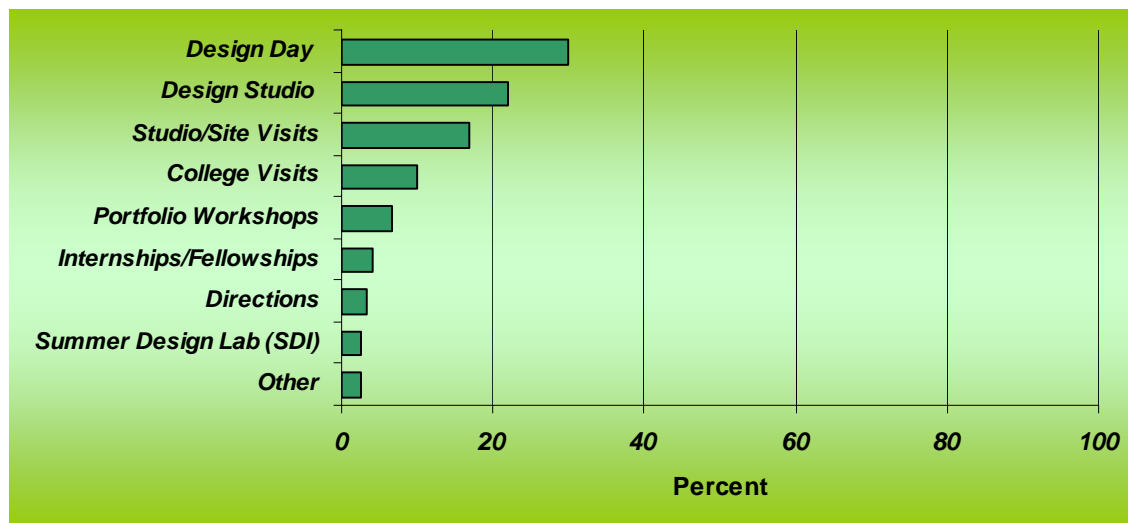
The program now also offers an open house for students, parents, and teachers at the beginning of each Design Directions semester, intended to introduce new and potential participants and other interested parties to the program and its offerings.

Some offerings, including Design Days, college visits, studio visits, and Directions peer-to-peer tours, aim to expose students briefly to different areas of design or issues they will confront in pursuing design careers. Others, such as Design Studios, portfolio workshops, and Van Lier Fellowships, offer students the opportunity to look in greater depth at individual design fields or career-related issues.

Educational offerings are held primarily during two semesters in the fall and spring, although Design Lab is held during the summer and the Van Lier Fellowship program is run on an annual rather than a semester calendar. Since its introduction, each type of offering has been offered at least once every semester.<sup>12</sup>

Between FY1999 and the first semester of FY2005, a total of 116 offerings were held.<sup>13</sup> Over these six years, Design Day was offered most frequently (32 percent of the total number of offerings), followed by Design Studio (22 percent), studio/site visits (18 percent), college visits (10 percent), portfolio workshops (7 percent), internships/fellowships (5 percent), Directions (4 percent), and Design Lab (3 percent). (See Figure 1)

**Figure 1. Frequency of Design Directions Offerings, FY1999-FY2005**



<sup>12</sup> With the exception of the portfolio workshop, which was not offered in fall 2002 or fall 2003.

<sup>13</sup> At the time this report was written, the study team had data only for the fall semester of FY2005. Therefore, annual comparisons are only offered through FY2004. A late communication from the education department indicated that two additional workshops may have been offered in fall 1998: *Gap Fashion Design* and *Urb Magazine Graphic Design*. In summer 2002, a limited number of Design Directions students, as part of SDI, attended Peru Meridian Studios, *3-D Models*; Ricco-Maresca Gallery, *Blurring the Lines of Creativity*; and a Corel software demonstration on the Today Show.



Over the six-year period examined, offerings were done in collaboration with more than 70 different firms and designers—about 15 of these for more than one offering.

### **Program Growth**

Both in terms of number of offerings and in terms of total hours of offerings, most of the program's growth occurred between FY1999 and FY2001.

In terms of the *number of offerings*, Design Directions more than doubled from 7 offerings in FY1999 to 15 offerings in FY2000, and then rose to 20 offerings in FY2001. Subsequently, there was no significant growth trend; 21 offerings were provided in FY2004. However, there was considerable variation in the growth rates of different types of educational offerings over this whole period. (See Table 1)

In terms of *total hours of offerings*, the program also more than doubled between FY1999 (37 hours) and FY 2000 (78 hours), and continued to grow strongly into FY2001 (167 hours). As with the number of offerings, growth has leveled off since then, with 173 hours in FY2004. (See Figure 2) There was also significant variation in the growth rates of different types of educational offerings in terms of total hours offered. (See Table 1)

**Table 1. Design Directions Educational Offerings: Number of Times Offered and Total Number of Hours, by Year<sup>1</sup>**

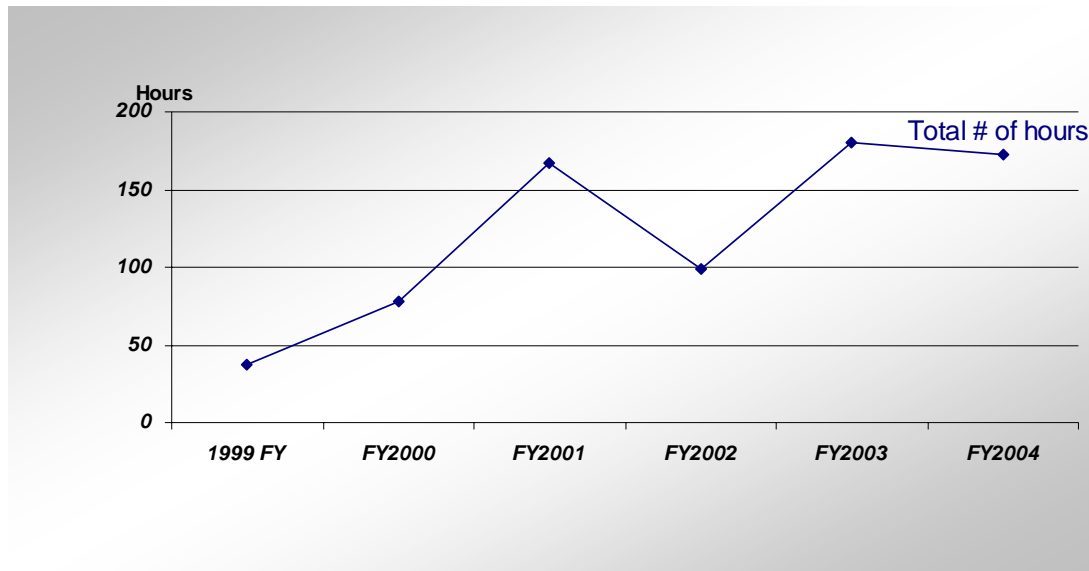
Educational Offerings	FY 1999		FY 2000		FY 2001		FY 2002		FY 2003		FY 2004		FY 2005 <sup>2</sup>		Total # of times offered	Total # of hours
	# of times offered	# of hours	# of times offered	# of hours	# of times offered	# of hours	# of times offered	# of hours	# of times offered	# of hours	# of times offered	# of hours	# of times offered	# of hours		
Design Studios	1	3	2	24	8	104	4	39	4	63	4	52	2	37	25	322
Design Days	4	28	6	30	6	37	6	42	8	56	5	32	2	14	37	239
Portfolio Workshops			1	6	2	10	1	2	1	2	2	18	1	6	8	44
Studio/Site Visits	1	3	3	9	1	2	5	14	4	12	4	12	3	6	21	58
College Visits	1	3	2	9	2	14	1	2	2	7	2	6	2	6	12	47
Internships/Fellowships			1	NA	1	NA	1	NA	1	NA	1	NA	1	NA	6	NA
Directions									1		2	13	1	12	4	25
Summer Design Lab (SDI)							1		1	40	1	40			3	80
<i>Grand Total</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>37</i>	<i>15</i>	<i>78</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>167</i>	<i>19</i>	<i>99</i>	<i>22</i>	<i>180</i>	<i>21</i>	<i>173</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>81</i>	<i>116</i>	<i>815</i>

NA: Not applicable;

<sup>1</sup> See footnote 7 for explanation of the Design Directions “year”

<sup>2</sup> Fall 2004 semester only

**Figure 2. Growth of Offerings, Hours, FY1999-FY2004**



## Design Workshops

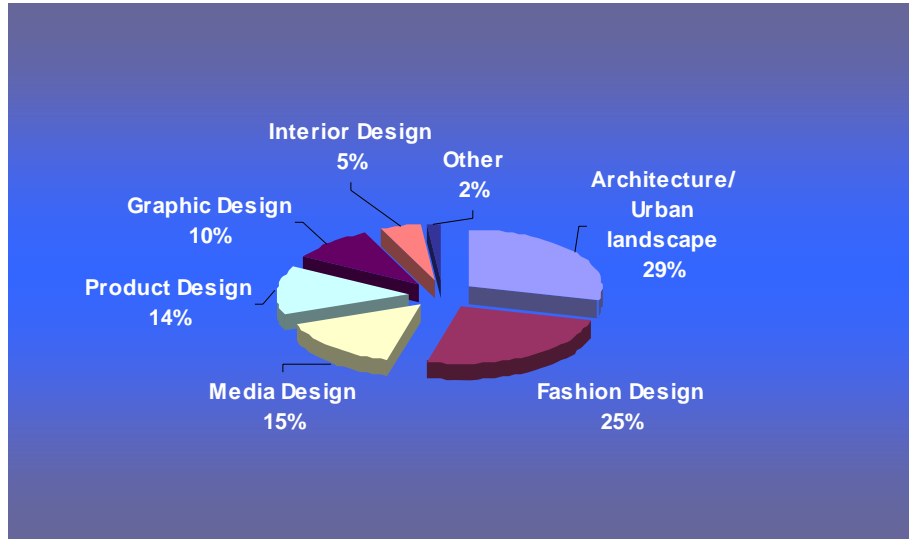
Design Directions offers two types of workshops—Design Days and Design Studios—that differ in terms of length and, consequently, the depth with which their subject matter is addressed. Most of the exploration of substantive design issues takes place in these offerings.

Workshops employ a mix of pedagogical methodologies, and vary in terms of content and subject areas. Close to one third (29 percent) of the 59 workshops offered between FY1999 and fall 2004 were in the area of architecture/urban landscape, and one fourth addressed fashion design (25 percent).<sup>14</sup> (See Figure 3)

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<sup>14</sup> Architecture/urban design includes fields such as: architecture/interior design, architecture/urban planning/landscaping, industrial design, urban design, urban landscaping, urban planning, built environments; fashion includes clothing and accessories such as hats, jewelry, sports outfits, watches, and other clothing and accessories design; media design includes digital design, film, light design, media/animation design, sensory design, and web design; product design includes furniture design and other individual product design; graphic design includes logo design, poster design, and other graphic design; and interior design includes interior design and retail (window) design. The study team lacked information on the topics of three offerings from FY1999.

**Figure 3. Subject Area of Design Days and Design Studios, FY1999-FY2005**



### *Design Days*

Design Days are single-session, hands-on design workshops led by professional designers. They seek to expose students to a wide variety of design fields, but at a relatively superficial level, as dictated by the compressed time-frame. Students in Design Days workshops have had the opportunity to work with renowned designers from large corporations such as Nike or Target, as well as emerging and established individual designers.

The content and structure of Design Days varies from workshop to workshop. For example, students attending *The Biggest Game in Town: New York's International Furniture Fair* in spring 2003 had the opportunity to go behind the scenes of the International Contemporary Furniture Fair (ICFF), look at how new products are launched, and meet designers from around the world. Students attending *Denim Innovation* in fall 2003 were given the chance to design new denim products with designers from Gap Kids.

Between FY1999 and the first semester of FY2005, Design Day workshops were offered 37 times, for a total of 239 hours. At least one of these workshops has been offered every semester. However, there is no clear pattern in the frequency with which Design Days have been offered by year or semester. For example, in FY 2004, Design Days was offered five times, while in FY2003, it was offered eight times.<sup>15</sup>

A wide variety of subject areas has been covered in one-day workshops, ranging from fashion to media design. Of the Design Days workshops offered between FY1999 and fall 2004, about 27 percent (10) addressed fashion design; 19 percent (7), product design; 16 percent (6), graphic design; 14 percent (5), architecture and urban landscaping; 14 percent (5), media design; and 3 percent (1), other areas.<sup>16</sup> Most of the 37 Design Day workshops held between FY1999 and FY2004 were offered only once; three were offered twice.

One-day workshops ranged from four to seven hours in length, and averaged slightly more than six hours. In offering Design Days, CHNDM has worked with more than 20 different firms and designers; Nike and Disney were the most frequent partners, collaborating on three workshops. Most *Design Day* workshops were offered on location, at instructors' studios or sites.<sup>17</sup>

### *Design Studios*

Like Design Days, Design Studio workshops are hands-on offerings taught by professional designers. However, Design Studios address a specific field of design in more depth; they are conducted over a period of several weeks, and give students the opportunity to work with designers on long-term projects.

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<sup>15</sup> The study team gathered that this fluctuation reflects, at least in part, the availability of professional designers to teach offerings at a given time.

<sup>16</sup> For three offerings (7 percent), no data on topic was available.

<sup>17</sup> The study team could not determine the exact location for all offerings.

The topics and depth of Design Studio workshops vary. For example, students in the fall 2002 *Monuments and Memorials* investigated the cultural role of monuments and memorials, and worked with designers to create their own concept for one over the course of six weekly three-hour sessions. Students at the two-session, seven-hour fall 2004 offering *A Day in the Life of a Fashion Design Student* had the opportunity to work hand in hand with fashion design students during their final year at the Parsons School of Design as these students prepared their portfolios for final review.

City of Neighborhoods Design Studios have been offered every year since 2002. Although the specifics of the project change from year to year, the program maintains the same structure, giving students the opportunity to work with architects, landscape designers, urban planners, and community advocates to explore issues related to a specific neighborhood of New York City.

Between FY1999 and the first semester of FY2005, Design Studio workshops were offered 25 times, for a total of 322 hours. Design Studio was offered each semester; but again, there is no clear pattern in the frequency with which this type of offering was offered by year or by semester. For example, four Design Studios were offered in spring 2002, while only two were offered in spring 2004. Close to half of the workshops (12 out of 25) addressed architecture/urban design issues; 20 percent (5), fashion design; 16 percent (4), media design; and 16 percent (4), both interior and product design.

## **Other Offerings**

### *Portfolio Workshop*

The Design Directions portfolio workshop prepares high-school students for a career in design by assisting them in assembling a portfolio they can use in applications for design schools, colleges, internships, or jobs. Until fall 2003, the workshop was a large single-session offering, with a panel of design school and college personnel discussing portfolios and the admissions process. Starting in fall 2003, the workshop was

transformed into a multi-session, hands-on offering in which design educators work intensively with a smaller number of students on developing their portfolios and helping them to navigate the design school application process and prepare for a career in design.

Between FY2000 (when it was introduced) and fall 2004, the portfolio workshop has been offered eight times. In FY 2001 and FY 2004, the workshop was offered in both spring and fall; while in FY 2002 and FY 2003, it was offered only in fall. Total hours offered between FY1999 and fall 2004 was 44. During the years when the format consisted of a panel of college and design school personnel, nine U.S. colleges, universities, and design schools were represented in total.

### *College Visits*

College visits offer Design Directions students an opportunity to talk with design school faculty and students; to participate in classes; and generally to explore what higher education in design is like. In the process, students also learn about potential careers in arts and design, and various disciplines within the broad area of design.

There is no clear pattern in the frequency and duration of the college visits. A visit could last anywhere from two hours (fall 2001) to seven hours (spring 2001). No college visit was offered in fall 2003, but two were offered in spring 2004. Between FY1999 and fall 2004, 12 college visits have been conducted to a total of six different colleges, for a total of 47 hours (4 hours on average). The most-visited colleges have been the Fashion Institute of Technology and the Parsons School of Design (three times each), followed by the City College of New York and School of Visual Art (two times each), and the New York Institute of Technology and Pratt Institute (once each).

### *Studio/Site Visits*

Studio/site visits give students the opportunity to explore “behind the scenes” at the workplaces of leading artists and designers in New York City, such as Tucker Robbins,

or at firms such as MTV. The number of studio/site visits per semester has varied over the years; for example, none was offered in spring 2001, while in spring 2002 four were offered, and in spring 2003, three. A visit generally lasts two to three hours. Between FY1999 and fall 2004, studio/site visits have been offered 21 times, for a total of 58 hours (about 2 ¾ hours on average). Soho and MTV have been visited more than once.

### *Internships*

An internship program was initiated in FY2000, giving Design Directions students the opportunity to work for professional designers for a period of six weeks. Originally, the education department's role was primarily to facilitate internships and to monitor students and host designers.

In fall 2003, the Van Lier Fellowship program was established with the support of Edward and Sally Van Lier fund of the New York Community Trust. This program replaced the previous, less structured internship offering. The Van Lier Fellowship is the only selective program offering; seven Design Directions students are chosen each year from a pool of applicants invited to apply by the program coordinator. As a part of the fellowship, each Van Lier fellow spends ten weeks with a New York City designer or design firm in a part-time, paid internship. In addition, Van Lier students meet three to five times a month to conduct other activities together, including training for and leading Directions peer-to-peer tours; taking out-of-state college visits; conducting internship training; and working on other opportunities as they come up, such as mentoring younger children and working with international design students. Van Lier students are also required to participate in a minimum of three general Design Directions offerings per semester.

### *Directions*

Directions was launched as a new Design Directions offering in fall 2003. These offerings consist of peer-to-peer tours of Cooper-Hewitt exhibitions, conducted by the



Van Lier students for other interested high school students. Directions was launched in September 2003 with tours of *The National Design Triennial: Inside Design Now*. Tours were conducted on one date in summer and five dates in fall 2003, and on one date in spring and four dates in fall 2004, for a total of 10 dates and 25 hours.<sup>18</sup>

### *Design Lab*

Another new offering, first conducted in summer 2003, is the summer Design Lab, held concurrently with the Cooper Hewitt's SDI program for educators. Design Lab is a one-week, eight-hour-per-day intensive that combines design workshops with professional designers, studio/site visits, and other activities. This offering continues to evolve; in 2004, it involved hands-on workshops patterned on the Design Days model from two design firms, a sketching exercise on the streets of New York City, a studio visit, and a Directions exhibition tour at the museum. Adult educators attending SDI who chose to do so were allowed to visit and observe the offering in progress one afternoon.

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<sup>18</sup> In Table 1 and discussions of total numbers of Design Directions offerings, Directions is counted as a single annual offering, on multiple dates.

## Students

Serving the youth of New York City—in particular “at-risk” or “underserved” youth—is the most fundamental part of Design Directions’ mission. Discussions with staff, designers, and students, as well as review of education department documents, indicates that the program has several distinct goals vis-à-vis its students:

- Encouraging and equipping young people to pursue careers in design;
- Developing general career and life skills such as analytical thinking, teamwork, self-confidence, and communications skills;
- Raising social consciousness;
- Promoting visual literacy;
- Introducing young people to a world of cultural ideas, as well as to institutions that many of them might not otherwise have a chance to attend.

The study team talked with numerous Design Directions students. Some were selected from a list provided by the education department for formal telephone or in-person interviews; others consented to brief on-the-record interviews at the summer 2004 summer Design Lab sessions; and still others were approached for informal discussions at offerings observed by the study team.

The study team was also able to examine written student evaluations collected at the end of each Design Directions offering for the years 2002-04. These provided some additional insights into student opinions on the strengths and weaknesses of program offerings.

## Applying to the Program

Students learn of the program from various sources: the semi-annual Design Directions poster,<sup>19</sup> word of mouth among peers, high school outreach presentations, and perhaps most important, teachers and parents who themselves were exposed to program outreach.

Admission is on a first-come, first-served basis, with wait lists for oversubscribed offerings. Whether a student has previously participated in Design Directions offerings is not formally taken into consideration one way or the other.<sup>20</sup> Applications must be signed by a teacher, parent, or guardian, but all students with whom the study team spoke considered the application process easy. This informal approach stands in contrast to youth programs at some other museums, such as the Whitney and US Holocaust Memorial Museum, which have highly selective formal application processes.

As noted above, one element of the program that constitutes an exception to the first-come, first-served rule is the Van Lier Fellowship. Van Lier Fellowships are for students who have participated and excelled in other Design Directions offerings, and who have demonstrated a commitment to the program. However, in comparison with other selective museum education programs, even the process by which Van Lier fellows are chosen appears relatively informal. For example, rather than being reviewed by a selection committee, decisions about Van Lier fellows are largely the responsibility of a single individual, the program coordinator—although the schools programs manager also provides some reflections on applicants.

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<sup>19</sup> This announces Design Directions offerings for the coming semester, and provides contact information for the program. It is mailed out to all New York City high schools; students who have participated in the program and are still in high school; designers who are interested in design education or have participated in the program; funders; other interested institutions (such as colleges and museums); and parents. About 6500 posters are mailed out each semester.

<sup>20</sup> The study team would note that there are both pros and cons to favoring new students over returning students in the application process, particularly in the case of offerings that are repeated annually (such as City of Neighborhoods Design Studios or the portfolio workshop). On the one hand, it might be argued that students who have already had exposure to a similar offering should not, in the case of oversubscribed offerings, be permitted to take spaces that might go to new participants. On the other, discriminating against repeat students with a demonstrated commitment in favor of new students whose commitment is unknown may also seem unfair or unwise.

## A Casual Approach

The program strives to present a friendly, open environment where performance expectations are self-generated rather than imposed from above. Students are free to attend as many or as few offerings as they wish, based on their interests. There are no requirements or structural inducements to attend any minimum number or prescribed mix of offerings.

This is not to say some students do not choose to devote a great deal of time and effort to the program. For example, one current student said,

Last year, I was spending maybe 12 hours a week on Design Directions activities. If I wasn't actually at a Design Directions program, I was doing something for one [at home]. ... Maybe not everybody else was doing that much; but I was into it, so I spent a lot of time working on it and thinking about it. I never let a project stop on design day. When everything was over, I would go home and maybe draw some more ideas.

Another interviewee, a program alumnus, noted:

I tried to go to as many offerings as I could. I even got into trouble for missing too many days of school to go into the city for Design Directions sessions. I would have gone to them all if I could.

However, making such an investment in the program is strictly an individual choice on the part of particular students.

Some students considered the flexible and informal character of Design Directions to be a fundamental part of the program's appeal, and believed that making the program more formal would weaken it. In the words of one alumna:

I liked the fact that I could pick and choose the offerings that appealed to me. ... One of the nice things about Design Directions is that it is really casual. You can just go to a few sessions. It's not school, it's very individual, it's a cool thing. That's a good thing for a high school kid.

Another serious Design Directions student agreed, noting, "The environment is very easy-going and comfortable. It's not something that would make us feel awkward."

The downside of this casual approach, however, can be seen in concerns the study team heard about student commitment. Several students (as well as staff members) mentioned the discouraging phenomenon of students who would fail to participate, or would attend a session or two of a multiple-session offering and not return:

Some kids just do it because they saw a friend do it, and they thought, 'I'm getting out of school all day!' Those are the kids who sit in the corner and *might* get turned on halfway through—if they show up at all.

It was disappointing when we had a few kids who just didn't care. They weren't disruptive; it was just that the rest of us wanted to get a project done, and they didn't have any input or interest.

I do remember that being a problem for some of the staff—a lot of the time, some of the kids just did not come back. ... I remember in the case of one three-session workshop, by the end the group was maybe half of what it had been at the beginning.

At the first session [of a recent multi-session workshop], there were a lot of people. Now, there might be ten left. I was pretty upset about that.

## **Levels of Participation**

Design Directions' formal goals include "serving" a certain number of students annually; this number is currently 500. However, the concept of students "served" is ambiguous, because students participate at many different levels. If every student touched by Design Directions outreach (including high school visits, career fairs, and so on) is counted, the program does indeed serve hundreds of students per year. If the count is limited to students who complete at least one offering, the figure is considerably lower. And if the count is limited to core participants who actively participate in multiple offerings, the figure falls to perhaps 25-30 students per year.

For the purposes of gauging long-term program outcomes, the experiences of core rather than casual participants are probably of greater interest. Unfortunately, the category is unavoidably vague, and must, to some extent, be defined arbitrarily. Any reasonable definition of the core participant group would have to include Van Lier fellows and at least *some* other Design Directions students as well, since the Van Lier program cannot

accommodate all serious program participants.<sup>21</sup> But drawing the line becomes problematic at some point: exactly *how many* hours of participation (or offerings attended) are necessary to qualify as a core participant? There can be no right answer, only a thoughtful but arbitrary line drawn for the sake of convenience. However, such a line has not hitherto been drawn by the program staff, so there can be no precise count of core participants at this time, even in this somewhat arbitrary sense.

### **Serving Disadvantaged Students**

As mentioned above, Design Directions makes a special effort to target at-risk youth—roughly speaking, students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds whose schools (and often homes) lack the resources to support their personal and artistic development. This raises an obvious question: what percentage of Design Directions students are in fact such at-risk young people? Again, the data necessary to answer this question are not presently available. For example, the education department does not collect information on students' family incomes or other proxies for disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds.

It would be correct to say that most of the participants at the sessions observed by the OP&A team were from minority ethnic groups (African-American, Latino, and Asian-American). To the extent that membership in such groups can be considered a rough proxy for disadvantaged status in a socio-economic sense, this observation may have some significance, but it is far from definitive.<sup>22</sup> Among the students the study team contacted, there appeared to be a wide mix: some were clearly from disadvantaged backgrounds, some clearly were not, and for many, it was simply impossible to determine. An education staff member offered the following subjective assessment:

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<sup>21</sup> The criteria for admission into the Van Lier program go beyond the issue of participation in and commitment to the program. In particular, there is a concern that the Van Lier program actively target at-risk youth in preference to similarly motivated and capable students from more fortunate backgrounds.

<sup>22</sup> The issue is further complicated by the fact that even if majorities of students at any given offering are underserved youth, this does not ensure that the majority of participants who attend multiple sessions are underserved kids.

It's difficult to say exactly who counts as "disadvantaged," but I'd say probably about 60-70 percent of the participants are from low-income and underserved backgrounds, and the rest are from middle class backgrounds and above. ... However, we don't ask people's incomes, so it's not possible to say exactly what we end up with. We *do* consciously go after young people and schools that are underserved.

## **Program Impact**

Even based on the small sample of students interviewed, the study team can confidently state that *Design Directions is a program that **can** have a profound influence on participants' lives*. More than one interviewee maintained that their experiences with Design Directions had deeply affected their educational or career plans. For example, one alumnus now at a well-known design school said:

[Design Directions] was probably the defining experience of my high school career. I learned more from those programs than I did in high school about what I wanted to do with my life. ... If I had not found that first Design Directions workshop, I'd probably be at a state college now doing liberal arts or something. I hope one day my designs will be on display at the Cooper-Hewitt.

Another alumna had similar comments about how her experience with Design Directions and her relationship with the coordinator altered the trajectory of her education:

Even up to the point where I was applying to colleges, I did not really think of design as a possibility; I was going toward fine art. ... [But] I was thinking, "I'm not really satisfied; what's missing?" I realized that I missed the problem-solving part of design. ... That sums up my experience with the program. There was something missing, something that I needed to find, and Design Directions helped me to find it.

As a last example, a Van Lier fellow discussed how incipient ideas about a career in architecture were confirmed for her by a very positive experience at her first Design Directions offering:

I started thinking about architecture in eighth grade, and decided I needed to explore it more before I took it as a major in college. ... It was when I was doing [my first Design Directions offering as a sophomore in high school] that I decided I really wanted to pursue it as a career.

All of the quotations above came from students who appeared destined for college and a professional career in any case, and the effect of their Design Directions experience was to redirect their interest toward the design field, or to reinforce a vague inclination to

move in that direction. However, on the written evaluations, the study team did find a quotation that suggested a more fundamentally transformative effect on at least one student: “It made me realize there is more to life than what’s on the street.”

In addition, one education department staff member offered the following anecdote that indicates how the program, in conjunction with the mentoring relationships formed in the course of it, profoundly affected one student’s life:

One student’s mother was mentally ill and at one point disappeared for two weeks. I was the one who stepped in because the school didn’t. ... [That student] is now doing well. She is graduating from Parsons, and her dissertation was on how she was hospitalized for a suicide attempt and only got out of bed because of Design Directions.

## **Program Strengths**

While the study team cannot judge the percentage of participants who have been profoundly affected by the program, the comments heard by the study team were overwhelmingly positive. These comments provided some insights into the strengths of the program from the perspective of the students, as well as some weaknesses.

### *Variety*

Prominent among the program strengths mentioned by students was the fact that, through its wide variety of offerings, Design Directions offers students a chance to sample a range of different areas within the design field, enabling students to decide which of these might be of particular interest to them:

I liked the program because it lets you see what career options are available for artists—graphics, clothing, furniture.

It’s good to be exposed to different areas of design. It gives you a chance to try different things and narrow down what you might want to do.

It teaches you new stuff: illustration, architecture, interior design, product design. It helps you to understand what you want to do. And what we’re really good at, they help us to understand more about. ... I was originally interested in fashion design, but when I did the High Line program, I liked that a lot. That’s how I found out I wanted to do architecture.



Design Directions provides a “pre-experience” of a career so you can see if you are interested in it. It can help you to change your mind, or make you even more focused on what you want to do. ... [Before I started the program] I believed I wanted to do architecture, but I was not completely sure. So I said, this should help me to decide; and it absolutely did that.

When I started, “design” for me meant “fashion,” or maybe furniture and chairs—very obvious examples. But as I took more workshops, I realized design was *everything*; it was the whole world.

## *Experience*

Another aspect of Design Directions that was frequently singled out for praise by the students interviewed was the chance to see how real professional designers work, especially (but not exclusively) during studio visits:

[Participating in Design Directions offerings] might not be exactly like working in design in the real world, but it’s pretty close. You get a general sense. So when we go into the real world, we won’t be so shocked and taken aback by what we find. We’ll already know: “Oh, we’ve done that—when I was in 11<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> grade, I did that with Design Directions.”

It was just an incredible experience to get the opportunity to go into real design firms and studios in New York City, and see what real designers do for a living.

My favorite part has been visiting the studios. It gives you a good sense of what a commercial art career would be like.

## *Networking*

Students also mentioned that one valuable benefit of their Design Directions experience was meeting people—especially professional designers and the Cooper-Hewitt education staff, but also peers with similar interests—who could both inspire them and, in many cases, provide practical assistance in breaking into the design world:

My favorite part of the program has been meeting new people—both the designers and the other students. ... I got the cards of the guys who run [the web design studio we visited], and I talked to them a little. I may contact them in the future, because I’m interested in a career in web design and graphic arts.

I met a lot of interesting people through Design Directions, including the head of design at Nike, with whom I still stay in contact. She wrote me a recommendation for RISD, and she is one of their most noted alumni.

I love [hat designer and workshop leader] Kelly Christie; I go and visit her sometimes. I also have [lighting designer and workshop leader] Stephen McKay's card, and I'm planning to call him about an internship this summer.

I signed up to learn more about design and to meet people who actually work in the field professionally. ... I think [Brand Jordan designer and workshop leader] Jason Mayden is really cool, and could help me out—he knows so many people in fashion and design.

One student summed up the value of such networking opportunities concisely in these words: “The designers are a community; you have to be in it.”

### *Personnel*

Along the same lines, students, especially those who had attended multiple offerings, were quick to praise the Cooper-Hewitt education staff and workshop leaders for their supportiveness and skill in relating to young people:

I was amazed by the personal attention I got from the staff, even though I was not a [Van Lier student]. They were always there to help me out, and took such a keen interest in what I was doing. ... I was like, “Why are you being so nice to me?” I guess that's their job. [Laughs]

The staff was extremely supportive—not so much for the networking, which I did myself, but for the personal support. The message was, “You can do this.” That's what I learned from the people there.

The teachers they choose are very nice and helpful, and teach in ways that high school kids find helpful. It's not that it's *simple*, but they teach in a way that *we get it*.

The workshops are great. The people—the energy they have—are just wonderful.

It should also be noted that students who participated in multiple sessions tended to single out the current Design Directions coordinator for particular praise, citing her willingness to go the extra mile to assist students:

Bonnie is now a very good friend. She helped set me up for an internship this summer. She's really been on my side. I can't say enough good things about Bonnie. I think she should be in charge of the Cooper-Hewitt. [Laughs]

Bonnie has definitely been a mentor to me. Eventually, I got to know her so well that she wrote a recommendation for me, and she's given me a lot of good advice. ... She has stayed after hours at the museum so I could work on my portfolio ... whatever I need, she'll stay and help me.

Bonnie was such a presence; she was one of the most influential teachers I have had—a real mentor.

Because of the bias in the sample of interviewed students toward recent participants, the study team did not hear similar comments about the first program coordinator. However, by all accounts, the first program coordinator also worked very well with young people, and was admired by repeat participants.

### *Activities*

Also worth noting was the general view among students that the design projects themselves were often interesting, engaging, “fun,” and “cool.” In other words, many participants simply enjoyed the program’s activities, in an immediate and direct sense:

My absolute favorite offering was the High Line. I had so much fun doing that, because there was so much creative input. And the thing was, you got to *build* your ideas. My second favorite was working with Target. We were on sort of a time limit for designing new products, and it was like a reality TV show: “You only have three minutes left, now go, go, go!”

City of Neighborhoods was fun because we got to go out and explore the neighborhood. With Monuments and Memorials, we got to explore the gardens. That was right after 9/11, and we went to Ground Zero where people had put up impromptu memorials, and we made one ourselves. I think people enjoyed those [offerings] because they seemed personal and close to home.

I saw that cool young people were working in design; it was not a stuffy thing—it wasn’t what I expected, but that was what got me hooked.

### *Cost*

Several students also mentioned the appeal of Design Directions being a *free* program. Some voiced this observation in a way that suggested cost might otherwise have been a significant barrier to their participation in such a program:

I’m looking for other programs like this. I’ve found some stuff—but you have to pay for them.

You have things like the math club and the science club in school, but for people like me who are interested in architecture, there isn’t much—except maybe these summer programs at college campuses where you have to pay *a lot* of money. But with Design Directions, it’s free, it’s short and to the point, and you have really easy-going, friendly teachers.

It was great because it was free, so I did not have to bargain with my parents. I just went, and it was a time for me to be creative, with no hassles.

## *Life Skills*

Finally, it should be noted that the advantages of the program were by no means limited to specific design skills imparted by a certain project. Even students who thought themselves unlikely to pursue professional design careers expressed a conviction that they were gaining something valuable from their participation. Rather than technical design skills, the gains mentioned by students were typically in areas such as developing communications skills, building self-confidence, learning to work in teams, learning to express ideas cogently, and general personal development. One student summed it up concisely in these words: “It’s not always about the project itself. What we do here is take ideas and learn to express them.” Others offered these observations:

I’m not really sure what I want to do for a career, but I think it is just so interesting to come here and learn new things. I think it is really helping me to grow personally. ... When you come here, you become more creative, you develop your ideas, you become more outgoing. When you do presentations, you become more confident about yourself.

[In the Van Lier program] we got to give tours as junior docents. I don’t consider myself to be particularly self-confident, but when we gave those tours, we *had* to be self-confident. We had to be up there in front of a lot of people, and it was very important to me that I was able to do that.

Every time I start something here, I say to myself, “This is going to be tough; I’m not going to be able to do it.” And every time, I prove myself wrong. When the results come, I’m always proud and it’s always better than what I expected. I find that a personal achievement. And of course, I’m going to put that in my portfolio.

As the last quote suggests, a number of students also mentioned that they saw participation in multiple Design Directions programs as a part of building up a portfolio for applying to colleges and design schools.

## **Program Weaknesses**

The interviews conducted by the study team failed to turn up any strongly negative or condemnatory comments about the program. The most common mild complaint heard in the interviews the team conducted was that some students would have liked more time for certain programs that were perceived to have “gone by too fast,” and to have been somewhat rushed toward the end.

Another area that several students commented on was their impression that outreach for the program could be more effective, and that the program seemed to lack exposure among potential participants:

I think the marketing might be an issue. I remember mentioning the program to other kids the first year I was at college, and they had never heard of it. ... I think it should be more common knowledge, especially in the arts community. The people I was talking to were familiar with the Cooper-Hewitt and the design world; why didn't they know about the education programs?

At my school, the posters are around, but that's just been recently, and no one knows what's going on. I tell them, "I'm going to this cool thing," and they don't know what the program is about.

I have friends in regular public schools who are interested in design, but they just don't know how to get into it. ... And it's because they don't have access—they're not really told about these types of things, because they are pretty much just kept among people who are already in the design world, or the people who are close to it. I think direct mail and going into the schools are probably the best ways to get the word out.

Only one student with whom the team spoke seemed displeased with the program, although her complaints about it were not well-articulated. It appeared that her dissatisfaction stemmed primarily from what she saw as a lack of focus in the program:

I'm not sure what kind of program this *is*, actually. Like, we're doing museum tours, and I don't really get why we're doing that. I'd rather participate in an art program or a class.

Some students also suggested that certain offerings might have benefited from more emphasis on the "hands-on" activities and less talk. However, this comment was made with reference to only a few offerings.

## Designers

Design Directions educational offerings are taught by professionals from a variety of design fields, and the program is intended to serve these designers as well as the high school students they teach.<sup>23</sup> By giving designers the chance to teach Design Directions offerings, the program provides them with benefits such as recognition from the National Design Museum, opportunities to network, fresh insights into problems with which they struggle in their work, and of course, the satisfaction of using their skills to help at-risk youth. By bringing together design professionals and high school students, Design Directions aims to enrich the design field as a whole.

The OP&A study team conducted interviews with design professionals who taught or otherwise assisted with Design Directions offerings, addressing issues such as

- How the program selects and recruits designers;
- What backgrounds and expectations designers bring to the program;
- Why design professionals choose to participate; and
- What participating designers consider to be the strengths and weaknesses of the program, its staff, and its students.

### Recruitment and Selection

Interviews suggested that recruitment of designers was not based on any structured, established process. Rather, the education department appeared to recruit designers rather informally, often based on personal contacts, recommendations, and network

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<sup>23</sup> The generic terms “designers” and “design professionals” refer here to both independent designers and designers working for firms, as well as educators with design backgrounds.

connections. For example, one designer explained how he got involved in the following words:

I met Bonnie Harris casually in a social setting through mutual friends. The design field in NYC is a very small world, and we just happened to meet and start talking. Later, she sent me an e-mail asking me if I would like to lead a [Design Directions offering].

Some designers also indicated that they took the initiative and contacted the museum about teaching an offering:

I expressed my interest in teaching with high school students and I submitted a proposal to [the program staff].

I didn't wait for anybody to ask me. I just called Bonnie and said 'Hey, I want to do it; let's make it happen.' And she made it happen.

Education department staff noted that designers are selected based on several criteria, including their level and area of expertise; the relevance of that expertise to the program; their ties to the design community; and their ability to interact with the target audience of urban high school kids.

### **Backgrounds as Educators and Designers**

Design Directions facilitators have varied backgrounds in fields such as urban landscaping, architecture, media design, animation, fashion design, and many others. Some have relevant experience that goes beyond the design field; for example, among the interviewees, one had a background in social activism, and another in environmental psychology. Some own their own studios or work in small design firms, while others work for large, renowned corporations such as Nike, The Gap, and MTV.

Most of the design professionals interviewed by the study team had formal training in a particular design or design-related field; relatively few had formal training as educators or experience in teaching at the high-school level prior to their work with the program. Some had previously taught in programs offered through other non-profit organizations; others had experience as college instructors or teaching assistants; and still others told the

study team that they lacked any teaching experience prior to their participation in Design Directions.

The designers who lacked formal teaching experience with high school students generally did not consider this to be a major obstacle. Some maintained that such experience was not necessary to succeed as an instructor in a program such as Design Directions; others told the team how they drew from their experience in work or family life to guide them when leading an offering:

As a college teacher, I am familiar with teaching people in the 18-plus group; and as a parent, I am familiar with teaching smaller children.

My background in education comes from my own experience. ... I come from a large family, with lots of kids and elders.

I was teaching a younger audience, but particularly with [teaching] design it is not age sensitive. A 12-year-old can come up with the same idea that a 14-year-old can. ... The execution might be a little different but that's about it.

I suspect most people in our field have practical experience that isn't that much different from teaching a class.

Other interviewees noted that the presence of Design Directions staff at offerings provided a valuable bridge between the designers and students, which lessened the need for experience on the part of the designers themselves:

[It] helps to have Bonnie as a "neurological buffer." At worst, the designers could just sit up there and give information, and she could translate it into student-speak.

There were other adults in the room who knew how to interact with high school kids, which was important since my background is with teaching college and grad students, which is a very different population.

However, one interviewee expressed strong disapproval of this tendency to downplay educational experience and training in selecting designers to lead offerings:

[The program should] get some people who have made careers as educators, rather than bringing in some random designer from [a "sexy" firm like Nike] who never teaches and never will teach, but will come and sell a product to kids and hope that maybe they learn something along the way. I think in a city of eight million people, there are high-level designers who are also educators, and who *understand* how to work with kids.



## **Motivations**

Designers mentioned several reasons for teaching Design Directions offerings. Some simply wanted to “give something back” to the community, and to serve as examples or mentors for high school kids. Others wanted to gain recognition for their work or ideas from the National Design Museum. Some were interested in learning from high school students who might bring new perspectives to old design issues. Others participated because they believed their contribution would serve the goal of bringing more ethnic and gender diversity to the design field. For many, more than one of these motivations came into play.

Although some of the participating design professionals received stipends, none indicated such remuneration was a principal incentive. Rather, they emphasized that personal factors drove their decision to teach Design Directions offerings. Indeed, some designers appeared to be participating even at some financial cost to themselves. For example, one noted, “I’m taking my own personal vacation time off to come out here; I’m not getting paid for this.” Another stated, “We’re losing money on this trip to New York; we’re doing it more for the sense of adventure, and to contribute.”

### *Giving Back*

In general, design professionals appeared emotionally drawn to participate in the program, often offering comments that revealed how teaching and seeing students learn was an extraordinarily rewarding experience:

It felt good to enlighten someone else about architecture and to share the things you learned. It feels good to see a light go on in someone’s head, because someone has done it for me [and] it’s nice to carry on that tradition.

I’ve always enjoyed teaching and giving back. I’ve gotten a lot of personal satisfaction out of teaching. I learn, too; that’s a part of it.

All I get from this is the feeling of helping some kids. Which I think is ultimately the best feeling. That’s really all you need.

No one gave me [an] opportunity [like this when I was young]. So I feel that now I am in a position to help, that's exactly what I should do.

### *Acknowledgement and Recognition*

Some design professionals indicated that one reason they participated in Design Directions was that they saw the program as an opportunity to make their work known to a wider public, and to receive recognition for it:

I am trying to educate my public about where the design comes from—about the heart and the soul that is behind it, and about how communities and families benefit from the work that I do. ... I want others to be inspired by what I do. I don't want to be alone in what I do. I want others to join me—students, anybody.

[I] find it very fulfilling if my point of view was somehow acknowledged by the Cooper-Hewitt either for its innovations or just for its point of view.

### *Learning*

Learning from high school students was also a draw for many of the designers interviewed. Some suggested they saw Design Directions offerings as a very creative environment, where they could pick up useful ideas and inspiration. One designer said that a Design Directions program was “the most creative environment you can be in.”

Others offered comments such as the following:

This experience is a motivator for me, refreshing my thought process and helping me to learn more about what I do by teaching.

Even if I didn't use any of the specific ideas generated by the workshop ... Design Directions kids got me thinking in new ways.

I learn as much from them as they do from me. Talking about one particular idea is one thing, but having 10-17 different perspectives and conversations about how that idea can develop is a different thing. And that is very exciting and enlightening, because it expands my vision as well.

### *Fostering Diversity*

Some designers specifically focused on the students' ethnic and gender background. One designer stated that his main motivation for participating in the program was to contribute

to the effort to bring greater diversity into the design field, where he noted that currently, “about 95 percent of designers are white men”—a situation that he considered unacceptable in a city as diverse as New York. He appreciated Design Directions mainly for its focus on exposing minority kids to the design field.

## **Designers’ Roles**

Design professionals interviewed saw themselves as playing one or more of several different roles in the program—teacher (or, more generally, facilitator in the process of developing kids’ ideas and skills), role model, and mentor.

### *Teacher/Facilitator*

Some designers saw their role in Design Direction principally in terms of introducing students to a new area of design, and/or helping students to cultivate design and general life skills:

Design Directions is good way for the students to get a design education because the basic skills and processes are similar, even across different areas of design—at least in the way that design problems are approached and solved. As students get more practice, they learn to solve design problems more rapidly and creatively. So I think Design Directions can serve either as an introduction to specific areas of design for newcomers, or an opportunity to build up basic design skills over a number of sessions.

The larger point is to help the kids develop interpersonal skills, public speaking skills, cognitive skills, and critical thinking. Such programs aim to teach life skills, not just design or art.

In general, the designers interviewed believed their work was successful in this area:

It’s amazing to see how some kids develop after taking a few workshops, to see them working through the design process and developing their cognitive and critical thinking skills. They become more confident in who they are.

From week one to week six, it would be like day and night, and you wouldn’t even know that these were the same people you were introduced to six weeks earlier. And often their parents would come up after the presentations and say “I can’t believe that my son or daughter could ever do something like that—get up in front of a group and speak like that.”

## *Role Model*

Several designers specifically mentioned the attraction of serving as role models for struggling high school kids:

When I was their age there was nothing [like Design Directions] in this field. Nothing. And that's really what drives me to stay involved. ... This program is something that did not exist for people like me. I tell the kids that I struggled extremely hard to get to where I am today, so if I can make it easier for any of you guys, I think the program is a success.

I didn't go to [design] school and I don't know how to draw. I don't know how to do things, but that doesn't stop me from doing things. ... [The kids can] see me and understand that I am facing the same problems they face, and that those problems are not necessarily problems, but opportunities.

## *Mentor*

A few designers stressed that their role goes beyond serving as teachers or even role models, to include discussions in confidence or even an ongoing mentoring relationship with students who choose to engage with them in this way:

I keep in constant touch with the kids because I want them to feel as if I'm not just a guy who came into town and told them a bunch of stuff and left. I want them to know that wherever they want to go, if I can help them get there, I will.

One guy mentioned an interest in comics, and I know a guy who is a VP over at DC Comics; so I'm going to put [the student] in touch with him.

We're gratified when some kids start to open up [to us] after the first day in a way that they probably cannot with their peers or high school counselors: "I'm going to college in a year, but I'm still not sure what I want to do." We gave the students all our contact information ... and we hope to keep in touch with some of them and find out what happens.

## **Program Strengths**

Most of the design professionals interviewed considered their experience with all aspects of the program to be largely positive. Many of the strengths mentioned by designers—the variety of educational offerings, staff competence, and others—paralleled those brought up in discussions with students.

## *Variety*

A principal program strength mentioned by many interviewees was its ability to expose students to a wide variety of design areas, which gives kids the opportunity to decide which of these might be of particular interest to them:

[Design Directives is] comprehensive in scope. It touches in so many disciplines, in so many different ways. These are strengths. Giving students the opportunity to see the working environment, to be exposed to all these different situations at that age, is an amazing opportunity.

## *Organization*

The design professionals interviewed generally believed that the organizational and logistical aspects were well handled by the program staff:

You have a lot of places, non-profits especially, [where] you go in and you have to do everything. You have to bring your own art supplies and you have to take care of all the logistics. Cooper-Hewitt would order pizza for kids and think about all the little details that make the program really run smoothly.

I can say that I was much more impressed with how Cooper-Hewitt is running its program after having done [another program] in the summer. I was taking for granted a lot of things, like how smooth it all went and how organized it is.

## *The Planning Process*

There is no formal, systematic process for planning offerings that is imposed upon designers. Instead, guidance on planning offerings is provided through informal means such as direct discussions and e-mail exchanges between the Design Directions coordinator and the designers. Many of the designers interviewed—especially those with experience in teaching—appreciated the flexibility and informality of this process, as they felt it allowed them to be more creative in their approach:

One of the main reasons I want to teach is the creativity element. I have been in situations where administrators have tried to micro-manage my teaching, and I did not like that.

The education department helped structure the whole day—but in terms of the workshop content, I was given a lot of freedom. I was not given a “guidelines kit,” and I would not have asked for such a thing.

Even the less experienced designers said that the informal approach provided adequate preparation for the workshop:

Bonnie gave a presentation for those who were unfamiliar with the process, and she gave us a walk-through on how to speak to the kids, what they expect, the best way to lay out the schedule. She is really influential in telling us to figure out where we should be and how we should do it, because she is ultimately the person who's in front of the kids the most.

### *Cost*

Like many of the Design Directions students interviewed, several designers considered the fact that the program is offered to students for free to be a major strength, particularly in the sense that it makes the program accessible to non-traditional audiences:

I like that otherwise elitist cultural institutions are now accessible to people who might not otherwise consider them accessible. ... Most museums are funded to some extent by tax dollars; they are community resources that should be accessible to the public.

### *Staff*

Another program strength identified by many designers was the competence of the program staff, and the program coordinators in particular, who were praised for their responsiveness to designers' needs, flexibility, administrative skills, and focus on education:

[The Design Direction program coordinator] always reminds me that she is there for me. She checks with me regularly and she just makes sure that everything that is suppose to happen is happening. And she is very responsive at my needs.

As someone from the outside coming in, they make it so easy for you to do a good job. The Cooper-Hewitt staff takes care of everything. If I say "I want to do this," they say "OK, let's see how we can make it possible."

The education specialization of the CHNDM staff responsible for Design Directions was another aspect that was mentioned as unusual and positive:

[The] Cooper-Hewitt staff really understand the principles behind the program and curricula, and they were extremely supportive. ... They really have an understanding of how kids learn, which a lot of museum education people don't. They are really educators themselves; they are not just administrators.

## *Students*

Another positive aspect of the program that was singled out was the diverse backgrounds of the students:

[Some of the kids] were privileged and were from private schools, and others were from poorer backgrounds. I think more balanced groups are better.

Design Directions draws a lot of young women into the design field, especially in the areas of product design and industrial design (which do not have a lot of women in them), and especially woman of color.

In this context, the design professionals also noted that repeat students were an asset, as their presence helped to create an atmosphere of collaboration and to facilitate relationships among students and between students and designers:

They have these kids coming again and again, and in this way they have created a culture of cooperation. You will see kids who have been there for a while and who were teaching the new kids.

I love [to see the repeat students], because it shows dedication; and I like keeping those relationships.

## *The Collaborative Atmosphere*

Many interviewed designers mentioned that because participation was voluntary and offerings took place outside the school environment, this fostered a culture of collaboration and seriousness in the offerings very different from the culture found in the schools. Relatedly, because students were self-selected for participation, most of the participants were motivated, dedicated, and enthusiastic about design:

[They] have self-selected students, [and] it's taking place outside the school—within the school, you have resistance to being active or to being pulled by the teachers. But at Design Directions they create this nurturing environment that's about creating and developing professional skills, and it brings out a different part of the students.

I think there is something really special about the collaboration among the kids. They are asked to collaborate, and I think that is not always true in other nonprofit settings. ... They've got a lot of volunteers—small group of kids working with an adult. That was also different, [and that] facilitates the collaboration.

Kids are excited to be there. They don't have that competitiveness that students would get in a school environment, and it's fun to see that kids are really serious about it.

They are quite motivated. ... Their education is not quite complete and they are much more open and come up with fresh ideas, and that I enjoy.

### *Respect for Students*

Another aspect of the program singled out by the designers interviewed as a positive factor was the care and respect with which the students were treated by the adults present:

Kids come after school and are hungry, and they have cookies and juice. They give the students notebooks or sketchbooks. That gives the students the feeling of ownership over the program. Those are little things, but they make the students feel that they are invested in and special ... and taken seriously.

At the end of the program they invite different professionals, designers, social scientist, educators, or artists to come in and comment upon the students' work. So they get this opportunity to share their work, and be taken really seriously. ... They will get suggestions and clues, constructive criticism—but also comments on what is really special about their work.

### *Scheduling*

Some designers noted that similar non-school programs for high school students tend to be held mainly during vacation time or weekends, and were impressed that Design Directions could get access to students during school time for some offerings:

What impressed me most was the ability of the educators at Cooper-Hewitt to get access to the students during the school day. That's a huge issue for organizations across the country that are trying to establish outreach programs at urban schools. You need to get buy-in from schools. Without that the students have neither the incentive nor the freedom to do these programs.

### **Program Weaknesses**

Although the interviews conducted by the study team found that design professionals had an overall positive impression the program, a few weaknesses were mentioned.



### *Museum Support*

Some design professionals perceived a lack of integration of Design Directions with the Cooper-Hewitt's other programs and activities, and a lack of guidance and support from senior management in dealing with the program's idiosyncratic challenges:

I've seen [the program coordinator] struggle unnecessarily with people who do not really understand the audience that we are going after with these programs. ... [She] has to struggle to be trusted to do what she does. I've seen that happen at lots of institutions, not just at the Cooper-Hewitt.

### *Human Resources*

One designer expressed concern that the human resources allocated to Design Directions were not commensurate with management's expectations for the program:

The biggest obstacle to success in these educational programs is the "mandate from upstairs." Saying that X students must be "served" may not be realistic in light of the actual support the program coordinator receives in running the program. The support does not equal the expectations.

Specifically, this interviewee felt that the Design Directions program coordinator needed more administrative support, which would free up time for her to work more with students and program planning:

The job of a program coordinator has two sides: the creative side, and the bureaucratic side. Ideally, these would be two separate jobs, at the very least. ... Bonnie needs more help and she needs an assistant. When she has to take care of everything in the program, it splits her energy and makes it hard for her to focus on working with the kids, which she does very well.

On the other hand, other members of the education department noted that the program coordinator had funds in her budget for a part-time assistant to undertake routine administrative tasks, and had been encouraged to hire one—but had declined to do so. Further, they noted that the program coordinator had access to administrative support from a number of sources, including interns, volunteers, and of course the Design Directions program assistant.

## *Space*<sup>24</sup>

Several interviewees mentioned that Design Directions could use a space specifically allocated for the program:

Some things that come up have something to do with the fact that they don't have a location.

The space was comfortable and adequate. [But] it would be great to have a dedicated classroom space.

The biggest weakness was that the program needed to be better organized in terms of facilities and supplies. ... The program must have more reliable access to a computer design lab.

## *Time Constraints*

Another issue that the team heard from several interviewees concerned time constraints. Some felt that there appeared to be some element of "rushing" toward the end of educational offerings, and that more time would be beneficial.

One thing that I thought could be changed is that the program could have gone for longer. All of the kids would say that. Maybe they don't have the resources or it is too much effort, but I felt that feedback could have been taken seriously.

The one thing we always look at is time constraint. We always say we wish we had another week or another two weeks to maybe add another perspective or bring some more people in or maybe have a visit to a professional office.

However, such complaints were often hedged by the general recognition that time is always a scarce commodity in educational settings, and the solution might simply involve better time management:

I felt there was not enough time, but that is typical. I think that there is a tendency with every class to start slow and then realize that there is a lot of work that needs to be done and then double speed the last few classes. Organizing time is key with these things.

I guess the argument against [longer offerings] is that if you have six weeks, you do it in six; if you have seven weeks, you do it in seven; if you have eight, you do it in eight. The program expands to fit the time frame, and six weeks seems to work pretty well.

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<sup>24</sup> As discussed below, space issues are currently being addressed by the museum. Designers who mentioned this issue as a weakness were most likely unaware of this.

### *Student Outreach*

While none of the designers to whom the team spoke believed that the class size of their offering was inappropriate (in the sense of being unmanageably big or disappointingly small), one expressed disappointment that he did not have the opportunity to work with a larger group:

My philosophy is [it's great if] you can affect 15 kids; but if you can turn that into 1,500, why not? I would rather come in and see hundreds of kids. ... I'm going to bust my butt to make sure the kids who show up get the best experience. But every time I come, I think it's a shame that only 15 to 30 kids get a chance to experience this.

This interviewee suggested that the fault might lie with the recruiting process, and that recruitment could be more systematic or aggressive:

I'd prefer to go out and recruit, versus having students sign up, because a lot of the kids are really shy and timid. They may have a hard exterior, but inside, they don't know how to speak up. So you have to almost tell the kids "We're here; we are right in front of you." So make the effort instead of expecting the kids to call or to hear about it.

Similarly, another interviewee noted that the ratio of new to returning students suggested that outreach efforts needed strengthening:

It is disappointing when you just see the same set of kids [as in earlier offerings]. Because you're thinking, is your message really getting out there the way you intend it to?

### *Designer Outreach*

Some designers also suggested that more outreach in the design community would be useful, so more designers had an opportunity to benefit from the program:

I think a lot of time, the connection with Bonnie sort of happens on the fly. She'll meet a person, and they'll introduce her to another person. ... But there are so many talented companies and people out there who don't know how the program works, or even that the program exists.

There could be more exposure. The industry should know about this; I don't think it should be confined to a network of people who know each other. It should be opened up to the whole

community of design. They should all know that what they are doing here is great, and we should replicate this across the country.

### *Guidance*

Although, as noted above, some designers appreciated the flexibility they were granted in planning their offerings, others perceived some lack of clarity about what was expected of them, in terms of the program's goals and objectives. Some also mentioned that they could have used more guidance on pedagogical lessons learned from previous offerings:

Overall communication is important, in terms of what it is they are trying to do. ... So if there were some set of guidelines for what the Cooper-Hewitt expected, that would be just easier for us to get stuff done.

My partner didn't have any experience and it was hard for me to say "OK, this is what we're trying to do," and really explain that in a concise matter ... I think if there was some sort of document ... like an HR package—just the do's and don'ts of the program.

### *National Replication*

At least one designer expressed some disappointment that the program was offered only locally, and recommended its expansion to a national audience:

It would be great if we could do what we are doing here in other parts of the country. I think there are a lot of communities that would benefit from this sort of thing in so many ways.

### *Feedback*

A single designer mentioned that he would have liked more feedback from the education department that could help him to gauge the impact that his contribution to program had on kids:

Do the kids put something together as a final project or paper concerning all they learned in the process? I would love to see it. ... I would love to know the impact that I have had on them, just as I would love to let them know about the things that they did [for me] and that I still carry in my heart and in my mind.

## *Funding*

Finally, and unsurprisingly, some design professionals also suggested the program could benefit from more funding. For example, one designer mentioned how an increase in funding might allow the program to expand offerings and inspire students in new ways:

Funding for them to get out and see other design environments—and other environments in general—might help spark some of these kids' interests in something else.

## Resources

### Human Resources

In addition to the department head, there are currently three individuals in the education department with formal responsibilities related to Design Directions: the schools programs manager; the school programs/Design Directions program assistant; and the Design Directions program coordinator. Other members of the department assist with the program on an *ad hoc*, as-needed basis.

For the most part, the day-to-day administration of the program rests with the Design Directions program coordinator and the schools programs manager. The former is formally subordinate to the latter, but sometimes acts with considerable autonomy, according to interviewees. The program coordinator carries most of the responsibility for on-site management of offerings and day-to-day contacts with designers. The schools programs manager works on shaping the programmatic direction for the coming semester, reviews and oversees the program coordinator's work, and has primary responsibility for grant proposals and contacts with funders.<sup>25</sup>

The first Design Directions program coordinator had a full-time program assistant and a part-time (bilingual) assistant. The Design Directions coordinator now shares a full-time program assistant with the schools programs manager (as detailed in the "Program History" section of this report), and no part-time assistant has been hired since before the second program coordinator arrived.<sup>26</sup> In FY 2004, the program coordinator also had the assistance of a Van Lier graduate fellow.

In several cases, roles and relationships within the education department appeared to the study team to be unclear. The team, for example, heard of staff members who explicitly

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<sup>25</sup> According to one interviewee, the first Design Directions program coordinator was more involved with activities such as fundraising and strategic planning.

<sup>26</sup> Funding for the latter has been held over in anticipation of a future hire. The former indicated that about 30-40 percent of her time is spent on Design Directions work.

reject the notion that their formal supervisor is their “boss,” or who fail to defer to direct instructions from their supervisor. At the least, this reflects a lack of clarity about roles, responsibilities, and accountability. This lack of clarity was particularly pronounced in the relationships of the Design Directions program assistant to the Design Directions program coordinator, and of the latter to the schools programs manager.

### *Coordinator Responsibilities*

The Design Directions program coordinator is involved with all aspects of the program: general administration; budgets and outreach; planning offerings; liaisoning with designers and funders; and interacting with students both as a program administrator and as a mentor. The current program coordinator indicated that by far the largest part of her work time—about half—is spent planning offerings (including contacting and working with designers). Her subjective estimates for the proportions of her time spent on other activities were as follows:

- About 20 percent, working with students (including attending offerings);
- About 15 percent, paperwork and record-keeping;
- About 10 percent, recruiting and outreach; and
- About 5 percent, fundraising.

Creating and sustaining ongoing relationships within the New York (and national) design and education communities is also an important part of the coordinator’s role.

Networking within the design community creates a pool of professionals from which the program draws the expertise it needs to conduct educational offerings. Networking in the schools and communities establishes relationships with schools personnel, parents, community leaders, and others who can form a bridge to the program’s target audience of at-risk youth. Another informal but important peripheral task for the Design Directions

coordinator is to keep informed about developments and best practices in museum, design, and non-school education that might be of relevance to the program.

### *Coordinator Strengths and Weaknesses*

Both the present coordinator and the previous coordinator were lauded by interviewees for their energy, competence, and commitment. Both received praise for their skills in planning and administering offerings. However, the first coordinator was particularly singled out for her networking skills:

Nell did [networking] very well. She went to conferences, she approached it systematically. She understood there was a board of education in the city, and she knew all the district coordinators. She hosted events at the museum. She understood there was a network of designers, and worked it systematically. ... She was *really* good at that.

By contrast, the current program coordinator was praised most highly for her ability to relate to the program's target audience, both in terms of serving as a mentor to students, and in terms of having insight into what activities and approaches will appeal to them.

As one interviewee noted:

[With the audience Design Directions is trying to reach,] it's a different language, a different environment, a different kind of socio-economic background. In Bonnie, they have someone who has a good eye for that.

In the course of the study team's interviews, some critical comments were also voiced with regard to both program coordinators. According to some interviewees, the first coordinator was not a "team player." Her enthusiasm for her own vision for Design Directions sometimes made her unwilling to listen to other points of view or compromise when contentious issues arose, which complicated interactions with the rest of the staff. The current program coordinator's weaknesses appear to arise from an insistence upon working independently, which entails both a reluctance to delegate tasks to subordinates, and a reluctance, at times, to engage constructively with those above her in the organizational hierarchy. Interviewees indicated this sometimes creates tensions and impairs communication among department staff. In both cases, the problem appears to



stem from a reluctance to share responsibility, and perhaps also from an unclear division of labor and failure of vertical and horizontal communication within the department.

### *Volunteers*

Design Directions also relies heavily on volunteered services from designers. Many of the independent designers who lead or assist with Design Directions are not interested in monetary compensation; instead, their compensation consists in establishing ties with the National Design Museum, or simply receiving the satisfaction of helping struggling high school kids. Likewise, when teams of designers from large firms such as Nike, Target, or Crate and Barrel present an offering, it is generally understood as a public relations activity for the firm, and the issue of compensation does not arise. (This is referred to in development jargon as an “in-kind donation of services.”) Although some independent and freelance designers and design educators do accept modest honoraria for their efforts (in the range of \$500 per day, or \$150-\$200 per session of multi-session workshops), the total cash equivalent value of labor services donated by designers to the program appears to be considerable. However, at present, use of volunteers for aspects of the program other than leading offerings—for example, mentoring students or assisting with the logistics of program administration—appears to be limited.

### *Staff Morale*

In a sense, it might also be argued that the education department staff themselves are, in a sense, “donating” some of their skilled labor services, because salaries in museum education work are notoriously low in comparison with other professional fields requiring similar levels of education, experience, and skill.

One perhaps ironic benefit associated with the financial unattractiveness of museum education work is that programs like Design Directions tend to be staffed by idealistic individuals who see their work as a calling, and throw themselves into it with great enthusiasm, dedication, and passion. The study team saw evidence of this mindset in

both the past and current program coordinator, as well as in other CHNDM education department staff. Unfortunately, this implicit reliance upon individual idealism can be a shaky foundation upon which to build a successful education program; it tends to dissipate if staff believe their efforts are not appreciated by senior management.

According to several interviewees, such “idealism fatigue” is not uncommon among museum educators, and the study team observed some evidence of it in the CHNDM education staff, among whom there appeared to be a perception that education programs are not given their due within the museum. Regardless of where education falls on the museum’s list of priorities, staff morale in the department may be a growing concern in the future.

### *Staffing Finances*

The OP&A study team was told by a senior CHNDM manager that funding for educational personnel at the Cooper-Hewitt is somewhat atypical among Smithsonian units, and this affects decisions with regard to staffing in that department. In general, federal employees tend to predominate among staff in education departments throughout the Smithsonian. However, only three CHNDM education positions are federally funded: the schools programs manager, public programs manager, and special projects manager. For all other education positions—including the director of the department—the museum is obliged to fundraise annually. The interviewee suggested that this weak funding base works against long-term strategic planning and programmatic stability, and contributes to some of the other structural weaknesses mentioned in this report.

### **Finances**

In FY 2005, the total CHNDM education department budget was over \$1 million, and in terms of total budget, Design Directions was among the museum’s top three educational programs.

The study team did not receive formal operating budgets or expenditure reports from the education department for Design Directions. Therefore, the team reconstructed the program's funding and planned allocations using grant proposals and status reports to foundations. (See Appendix B) Valuations of in-kind contributions were not included in the study team's estimates. Specifically, the figures discussed in this report do not include implicit costs for:

- The labor of design professionals who instructed or facilitated offerings on a volunteer basis;
- The labor of education department staff not explicitly funded in the Design Directions budget who assisted with Design Directions on an as-needed basis; and
- Space, facilities, and supplies provided without charge by program partners.

### *Funding Sources*

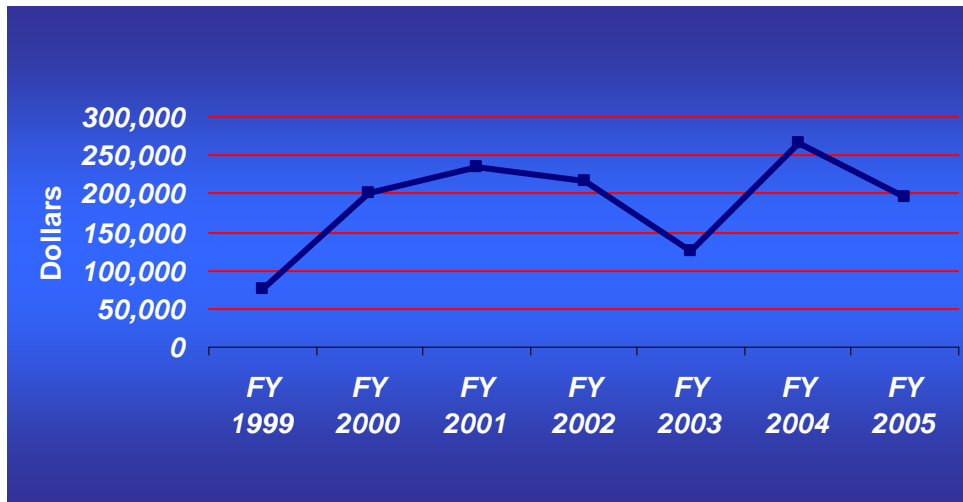
According to grant proposals, status reports, interviews with CHNDM staff, and interviews with representatives of funding foundations, Design Directions is entirely funded through external grants from non-profit organizations (foundations), for-profit organizations, and private individuals.<sup>27</sup>

Between FY1999 and FY2005, it received about \$1.3 million in funding. Over that period, Design Directions received an average of about \$188,000 in funding per fiscal year. Figure 4 shows funding received from FY1999 to FY2005.

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<sup>27</sup> Except for labor contributions from federal employees, especially the schools programs manager.

**Figure 4. Design Directions Funding, FY1999-FY2005<sup>28</sup>**



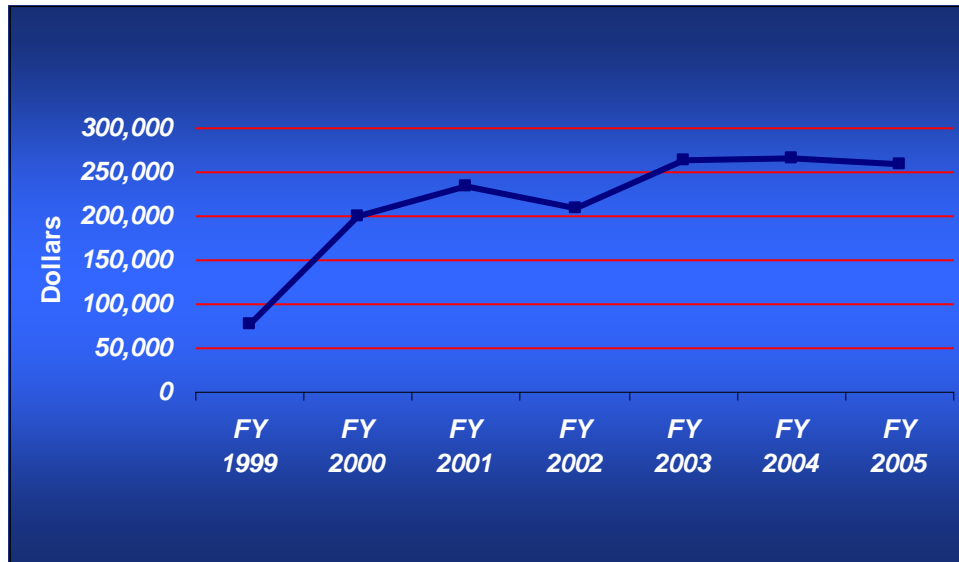
Based on the available data, it appeared that Design Directions received the overwhelming majority of its funding from foundations (almost 90 percent). The remainder consisted of grants from firms (about 9 percent), and private donations (about 1 percent).

*Planned Allocations by Year*

Between FY 1999 and FY 2005, planned allocations for Design Directions were about \$1.5 million (\$1,508,480). Planned allocations increased from \$76,500 in FY1999 to \$259,780 in FY2005. However, Figure 5 shows that growth over this period was not steady. For example, planned allocations were about \$25,000 less in FY2002 than in FY 2001, while they increased by more than \$53,000 from FY2002 to FY2003.

<sup>28</sup> Figure for FY2005 is at the time of this writing.

**Figure 5. Design Directions Planned Allocations, FY1999-FY2005**



*Balance of Funding and Planned Allocations*

When examining program funding and planned allocations, the study team found the latter tracked the former closely in FY1999-2002 and FY2004, but planned allocations exceeded funding by \$138,000 in FY2003. (See Table 2 and Appendix C)

**Table 2. Design Directions Funding and Planned Allocations, FY1999-FY2000**

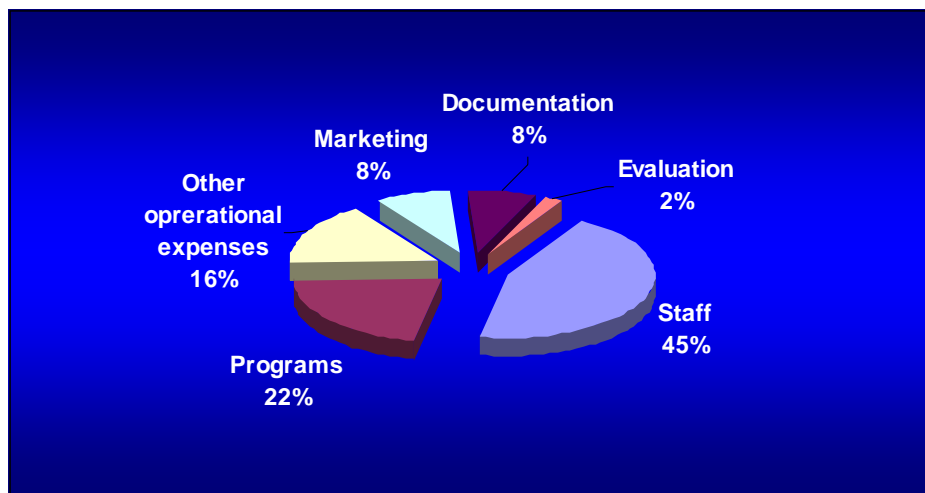
<b>Year</b>	<b>Funding</b>	<b>Planned allocations</b>	<b>Balance</b>
FY1999	\$76,000	\$76,500	(\$500)
FY2000	\$200,000	\$200,000	\$0
FY2001	\$235,000	\$234,500	\$500
FY2002	\$216,782	\$209,700	\$7,082
FY2003	\$125,000	\$263,000	(\$138,000)
FY2004	\$265,000	\$265,000	\$0
FY2005	\$195,000	\$259,780	(\$64,780) <sup>29</sup>

<sup>29</sup> At the time the data for this report was assembled.

### *Planned Allocations by Category*

In the period from FY1999 to FY2005, planned allocations for Design Directions staff (salaries and benefits for the program coordinator and full-time program assistant, wages for a part-time program assistant contractor, and professional development) were calculated to be 45 percent (\$675,000) of total budgeted program planned allocations. The remaining planned allocations were for the direct costs of educational offerings (22 percent, or \$325,800); operational costs, including security, maintenance, fax, mailing, postage, and support services (16 percent, or \$245,000); marketing, including designing, printing, and mailing the semi-annual poster (8 percent, or \$119,480); photo and video documentation (8 percent, or \$113,200); and program evaluation (2 percent, or \$30,000). (See Figure 6)

**Figure 6. Overall Planned Allocations by Category, FY1999-FY2005**



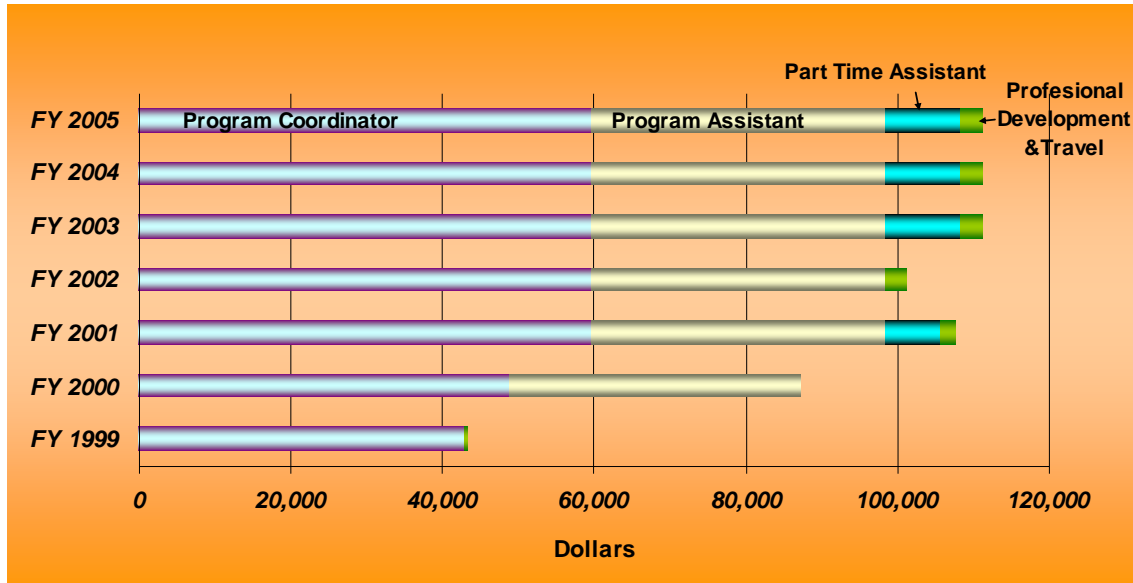
### *Planned Allocations for Human Resources*

Over the six-year period studied, planned allocations for human resources increased from \$43,500 in FY1999 to \$111,500 in FY2005. The largest increases occurred between FY1999 and FY2000 (when funding for a full-time program assistant was added), and between FY2000 and FY2001 (when the program coordinator's salary was raised and

funding was added for a part-time contractor to work as a bilingual program assistant). Subsequently, planned allocations for labor held steady, with the exception of FY2002, when funding for the part-time program assistant contractor was absent. Figure 7 shows that planned allocations for the program coordinator's salary and benefits accounted in FY2005 for more than half (54 percent, or \$60,000) of the total planned allocations for staff. The remainder of FY2005 planned allocations for staff went to the program assistant's salary and benefits (35 percent, or \$38,500) and the contractual part-time program assistant's remuneration (9 percent, or \$10,000). An additional 3 percent (\$3,000) of FY2005 planned allocations for staff went into training and professional development.

Interviews with CHNDM staff revealed that the program has not had a contractual part-time bilingual assistant in several years, although the Design Directs budget has included \$10,000 for one since FY 2003. In addition, the full-time program assistant, whose salary and benefits appear on the Design Directions budget, does not work primarily for the Design Directions program coordinator. According to interviewees in the education department, the decision to "share" this program assistant between the Design Directions program coordinator and schools programs manager was a compromise necessitated by the museum's elimination of the schools programs assistant position in the fall of 2001. Without this arrangement, interviewees suggested the department would have been compelled to terminate the program, in light of the additional administrative burdens it creates.

**Figure 7. Planned Allocations for Staff Compensation (Salary and Benefits) by Year, FY1999-FY2005**



*Planned Allocations for Educational Offerings*

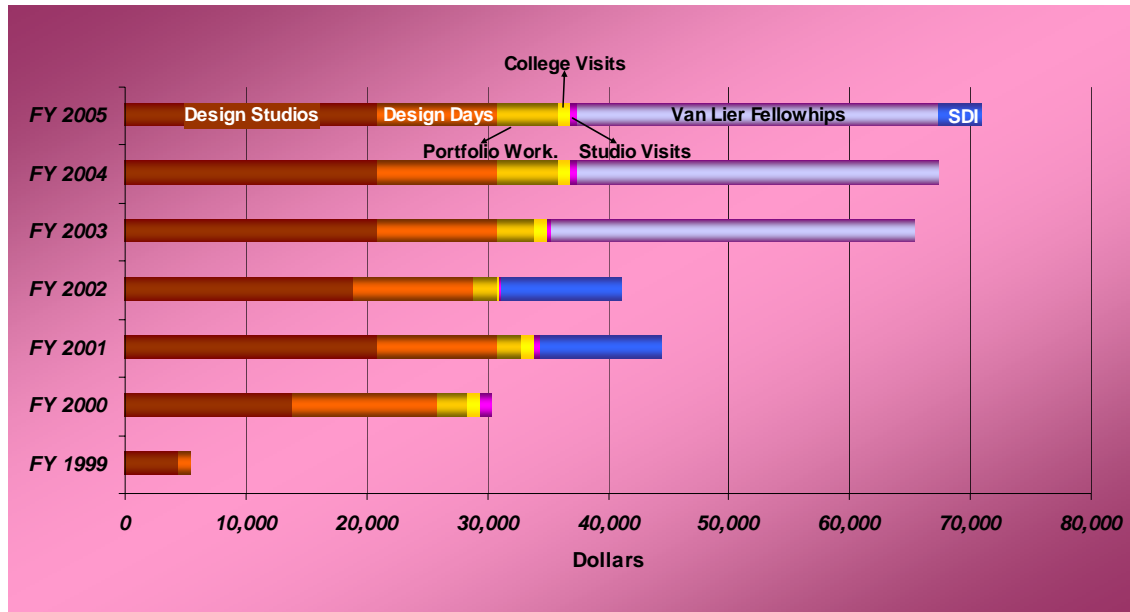
Planned allocations for educational offerings increased sharply in the early years of the program, from \$5,500 in FY1999 to \$30,500 in FY2000, and subsequently more than doubled to \$71,100 in FY2005. As shown in Figure 8, much of this increase is attributable to the addition of the Van Lier fellowship program in FY2003.

The Van Lier program is by far the most expensive Design Directions educational offering. At \$30,000 per year, planned allocations for the Van Lier program are roughly comparable to direct planned allocations for all other offerings *combined*. Planned allocations for this program accounted for 42 percent of total planned allocations for educational offerings in FY2005 (and 12 percent of all FY2005 planned allocations). As a fraction of total program planned allocations between FY1999 and FY2005, planned allocations for the Van Lier Fellowship since FY2003 amounted to 6 percent. It must be



noted, however, that the Van Lier program is funded by an earmarked grant—the only grant received by the program earmarked for a specific offering.<sup>30</sup>

**Figure 8. Planned Allocations for Educational Offerings by Year, FY1999-FY2005**



Design Studios are the next-most-costly educational offerings, with planned allocations of about \$17,400 on average per year since FY1999. Planned allocations for Design Studios jumped by half between FY2000 and FY2001, from \$14,000 to \$21,000, and then decreased by 15 percent in FY 2002. Since FY2003, Design Studios planned allocations have held steady at \$21,000. In FY2005, this represented 30 percent of educational offerings planned allocations (or 8 percent of all FY2005 planned allocations). Between FY1999 and FY2005, planned allocations for Design Studios amounted to 8 percent of total program planned allocations.

Design Days workshops were the third most expensive educational offering category, with planned allocations of \$9,000 on average since FY1999. Interestingly, while planned allocations for staff and some other educational offerings were increasing due to

<sup>30</sup> Budget figures obtained by the study team do not show any funds allocated for the internships that preceded by Van Lier Fellowship.

overall program growth, Design Days planned allocations decreased by 17 percent between FY2000 and FY2001, from \$12,000 to \$10,000. (Portfolio workshops and studio visits planned allocations decreased during FY2000 and FY2001 as well.) Since then, budgeted planned allocations for one-day workshops have held steady at \$10,000. In FY2005, Design Days accounted for 14 percent of total planned allocations for educational offerings (or 4 percent of all FY2005 planned allocations). Between FY1999 and FY2005, planned allocations for Design Days amounted to 4 percent of total program planned allocations.

The portfolio workshop was the fourth-highest educational offering expenditure category, with average annual planned allocations of \$3,250 per year since it was introduced in FY2000. Planned allocations doubled between FY2000 and FY2004, from \$2,500 to \$5,000. In FY2005, the portfolio workshop continued to account for \$5,000 of planned allocations, equivalent to 7 percent of FY2005 educational offering planned allocations (or 2 percent of all FY2005 planned allocations). As a fraction of total program planned allocations between FY1999 and FY2005, planned allocations for the portfolio workshop since FY2000 amounted to slightly more than 1 percent.

Planned allocations for college visits have remained constant at \$1,000 per year since these were first offered (except in FY2002, when planned allocations were only \$100). In FY2005, college visits accounted for more than 1 percent of planned allocations for educational offerings (or less than 1 percent of all FY2005 planned allocations). Between FY1999 and FY2005, planned allocations for college visits amounted to less than 1 percent of total program planned allocations.

Planned allocations for studio/site visits were even lower than those for college visits, averaging just over \$500 per year since FY2000, when this category first appeared explicitly on the Design Directions budget. In FY2005, planned allocations for studio/site visits were \$500, or less than 1 percent of total planned allocations for educational offerings.

In FY2005, \$3,600 was budgeted for the week-long summer Design Lab intensive conducted simultaneously with SDI. This accounted for 5 percent of total planned allocations for educational offerings for that year (or 2 percent of all FY2005 planned allocations).<sup>31</sup> As a fraction of total program planned allocations between FY1999 and FY2005, planned allocations for the Design Lab and other activities related to SDI in the years such funds were budgeted amounted to 2 percent.

### *Planned Allocations, Expenditures, and Costs*

How closely actual expenditures have reflected planned allocations remains unclear to the study team. One interviewee in the education department noted that expenditures in many cases have been lower than planned allocations; but no definitive figures for expenditures were provided.

Regardless of the level of actual expenditures, it should be noted that total program costs are probably considerably higher than these expenditures. One important reason for this is that, as noted in the “Human Resources” section above, much of the labor for instruction and facilitation of program offerings is provided by designers on a volunteer basis. While the study team did not attempt to estimate an equivalent cash value for such donated labor services, the value is not negligible. In addition, program support is provided by other CHNDM education department staff on an as-needed basis, and the cost of such services does not explicitly appear in planned allocations for Design Directions. Finally, some programs are conducted in partnership with organizations (such as the Parsons School of Design) that provide space, facilities, and materials without charge. As an suggestive example of the cumulative weight of such implicit costs, one CHNDM staffer, in discussing the budget for the SDI program, noted,

When we did the 2005 budgets, we did two columns: one with actual expenditures on SDI, and the other showing what it would have cost if we didn’t wheel and deal—that is, if we didn’t rely on

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<sup>31</sup> In FY2001 and FY2002, \$10,000 was allocated in the program budget for expenditures on SDI workshops to expose Design Directions to a national audience. In FY2003 and FY2004, the Design Lab was offered, but the study team did not find a separate line item for it in Design Directions’ budget.

the goodness of people's hearts to waive the honorarium, or if we didn't do it at [the NMAI Heye Center] and had to rent space at the City University grad school instead. The figure *doubles*.

### *Expenditures Per Student*

The question of how, and even whether, per-student expenditures for Design Directions can be calculated is debatable. While planned allocations might be used as a proxy for expenditures in the numerator of such a calculation, the denominator (students served) is difficult to pin down, because of the different levels at which students participate in the program. Interviewees indicated that even among education department staff, there is disagreement about how to properly count "students served."

For example, using the formal goal of 500 students served and explicit budgetary planned allocations in FY2004, per-student costs in that year would appear to come to slightly over \$500. However, such a figure must be regarded as the minimum in a wide range of plausible figures, for reasons mentioned in the "Students" section which was presented earlier. (Should a student who spends five minutes at a Design Directions career fair table be counted just as, say, a Van Lier fellow?)

In light of such considerations, the study team has chosen to refrain from calculating any estimate of per-student expenditures for Design Directions. This is an area where any final figure is likely to conceal arbitrary assumptions, and is open to misinterpretation.

### **Space**

Design Directions educational offerings currently take place in rented space suitable for educational activities, at the museum (in space shared with other departments), or on-site at studios, design schools, design firms, and other sites throughout New York City. Some interviewees—including staff, designers, board members, and a few students—saw the lack of a dedicated, permanent space for the program as a problem, for several reasons.

First, some interviewees thought that the lack of a permanent space dedicated to Design Directions affected the program's visibility and image both within and outside the museum, and reduced opportunities for interchange with museum staff. A second concern was that the lack of permanent space complicates the logistics of organizing and conducting offerings. A final concern centered on the inability of the program to provide a space where students could store their work, work on projects outside of class hours, or meet among themselves (or with designers or staff) on an informal basis.

However, it should be noted that the interviews for this study were conducted at a time when serious efforts were underway to address educational space issues. Both the quantity and quality of space available for educational use at the museum are set to increase in the near future, and interviewees concerned about space were most likely not aware of this. The museum's lecture room, which was being renovated at the time this study was done and was not available for use by Design Directions, is expected to re-open in fall 2005. This space will be programmable by the education department, although it will be shared with the museum as a whole. By early 2006, a new design studio space will also be available, complete with classroom space, tables and chairs, storage, and other facilities. This is intended primarily for use by Design Directions and schools programs, although it will be available for use by other museum programs. The recently-proposed plans for major expansion of the museum's physical facilities also propose, in effect, a tripling of education space, with 25 percent of the new underground space devoted to an auditorium.

## Miscellaneous Findings

### Uniqueness

In the course of this study, the OP&A study team noted a combination of factors that together make Design Directions truly *unique* among non-school and museum education programs. Roughly summarized, these are the following:

- The substantive focus of Design Directions is on *design, broadly defined*—in contrast to a larger universe of non-school programs that focus on either art or some particular facet of design, such as architecture.
- The program brings the formidable resources of the National Design Museum to bear on its educational task. This is key, because Design Directions seeks to inspire young people by bringing them into close contact with “stars” in the design field. Without the Cooper-Hewitt affiliation to open doors in the design community, it is unlikely that the program could secure that kind of talent. Further, the Cooper-Hewitt affiliation gives the program leverage with schools and general prestige.
- The program brings focus on design and the resources of the Cooper-Hewitt together, *without charge*, for the benefit of interested local high school students who would otherwise surely lack such opportunities.

In its background research, the team discovered only a handful of programs for high school students with a similar design focus, and none that put the services of world-class designers and design organizations at the disposal of all interested high school students free of charge. In sum, there appeared to be few programs comparable to Design Directions on offer not only in New York City, but across the country.

## National Replication

The study team was also interested in the issue of whether Design Directions should or could be extended to a national audience, as the education department is currently attempting to do with the City of Neighborhoods program.

Plans concerning the replication of the program outside of New York City do not currently exist, although this issue has been discussed informally by the education department staff, board members, and the Cooper-Hewitt education committee. Among interviewees, opinions varied about the feasibility of replicating Design Directions in other locations. The most frequent reservation was the perception that it would be impossible to establish similar programs in cities without access to the unique design resources of New York City. However, other interviewees insisted that many other cities have design communities of sufficient size and vitality to support such programs, although of course the emphasis of local design communities varies—the Los Angeles community has more of a focus on the entertainment industries, San Francisco’s is more tech-oriented, and so on—and this would have to be accommodated in local programs.

The issue of national replication remains in the background in discussions of Design Directions’ future. For example, without prompting, one board member to whom the study team spoke noted, “Here in NYC we are in the design capital of the nation; we’re the laboratory for new ideas and approaches. We need to take what we have done to other places.” Another board member agreed, suggesting that the Smithsonian Affiliations program could be one channel for the national diffusion of programs modeled on Design Directions:

If we could link [Design Directions] up with Affiliate museums, it will be great. ... Having done the program already is a good advantage, as other museums don’t have to think about creating it from the scratch. Through our experience, [Affiliate museums] could already know the dos and don’ts. All you need is to train people.

Another board member who favored such national outreach also assumed the administrative demands of replicating the program for the CHNDM education department

would be relatively light, but nevertheless expressed a concern that the department lacks the resources that would be required for this step:

What the education department should be doing is *modeling* programs like Design Directions for national outreach. If you want to do that, at some point, you need the resources for a national push—not in the sense of administering programs in other cities, but in the sense of helping organizations in other cities to develop their own programs along the lines of the Cooper-Hewitt’s models. The resources to do that have never been there.

## **Feedback Mechanisms**

Feedback mechanisms and internal program evaluation have been informal, for the most part. Students are given written evaluation forms at the end of each offering, on which they are invited to discuss what they liked and disliked about the program through answers to a series of structured questions. These evaluations are reviewed by the Design Directions coordinator, who also informally solicits feedback from participants.<sup>32</sup>

It is not clear to the study team exactly how information received from students is used to modify future offerings. For example, this feedback has not been used to create a formal list of best practices, lessons learned, or pitfalls to be avoided. Rather, it appears that student feedback is subjectively taken into account by the Design Directions coordinator in planning future offerings.

## **Web Presence**

The Cooper-Hewitt’s national education outreach efforts do not effectively exploit the enormous potential of the Web. One principal reason seems to be the museum’s ongoing effort to create a state-of-the-art website, an ambitious project that may divert attention from the more manageable task of building incrementally on its current site.

Design Directions’ presence on the current CHNDM website is very limited. It consists of a paragraph describing the program in very broad outlines, a single endorsement quote

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<sup>32</sup> Staff indicated that a general lack of language skills among program participants has been a barrier to receiving clear feedback from students.



from a student, and a telephone number for interested students to call. A student first learning of the program through the museum website, or consulting the website for further information after hearing about Design Directions by word-of-mouth, would find very little descriptive information, let alone anything likely to stir interest or excitement.



## **CONCLUSIONS**

### **A Program With Many Strengths**

The feedback that the study team received on the Design Directions program was overwhelmingly positive.

Students generally like the educational offerings, and believe they gain valuable skills from participating in them. For some students, participation in Design Directions was a transformative experience. The program

- Provides a unique opportunity for disadvantaged New York City high school students to learn about design from world-class designers;
- Offers participants the chance to develop both specific design skills and general life/career skills through engaging activities;

- Gives participants a first-hand taste of different areas of design; and
- Provides interested students with tools (skills, connections, inside information, and personal mentoring) that can ease their entry into a design career.

Designers also have very positive views on the program and their participation in it, and most of those with whom the study team spoke expressed a willingness to contribute again if approached. Especially valuable to designers are

- A chance to share their passion for design with young people;
- The opportunity to establish ties with the National Design Museum, with the valuable connections and recognition that this entails; and
- A chance to work through design ideas with a “youth focus group.”

Overall, Design Directions stands out among similar non-school education programs in several structural, organizational, and administrative aspects. The program offers

- Outstanding variety in terms of the subjects it covers, thus giving students exposure to a potentially wide range of design fields and issues;
- Sufficient depth for more motivated and interested students to explore design issues and careers in greater detail;
- Flexibility that allows students to get a broad or focused experience of the design field, according to their own inclination;
- An atmosphere of respect, support, and collaboration in which many students exhibit noticeable gains in self-confidence and assertiveness;

- Organizational flexibility to accommodate the interests of students, designers, and the museum; and
- A committed staff that is highly competent as both administrators and educators.

From the museum's perspective, Design Directions is also valuable in light of its potential to broaden the Cooper-Hewitt's audience beyond its traditional base. It does this by drawing students from disadvantaged backgrounds into the world of design, and giving them the tools both to appreciate design as a concept, and to succeed in design careers if they should choose to do so. In the long run, this could prove valuable as part of a wider effort to diversify CHNDM audiences to reflect the changing demographics of New York City and the nation.

Design Directions is, in the true sense of the word, a *unique* opportunity for New York City youth. While there are other high-quality museum education programs, many of which are free, none of these offers the opportunity to explore design in all of its aspects with first-rate design professionals. And while there are other high-quality design education programs, these are generally not free or targeted at disadvantaged youth.

The study team did identify some challenges facing the program, and the remainder of this section discusses these. However, these should be read in the context of the positive points identified above. Overall, the program has many strengths. Even interviewees who raised concerns and identified weaknesses felt that Design Directions was, on the whole, a strong program that offered a valuable opportunity to New York City youth.

## **Strategic Planning**

### **Program Goals**

The study team believes the goals of Design Directions have always been vague. As a result, the program's planning and evolution have been somewhat arbitrary. Examining education department documents in which goals were discussed did not dispel this impression. There are three dimensions in which the goals of the program need to be explicitly clarified:

- The balance between serving students versus serving designers;
- The relative priorities of the various goals for students (encouraging careers in design, developing general life and career skills, raising social awareness, and so on); and
- The relative priorities of the various goals for designers (providing designers with an opportunity to serve the community, giving them a chance to form mutually-beneficial ties to the museum, and so on.)

The study team sees a need to explicitly address priorities among these goals, and state these priorities in a definitive form that is sufficiently concrete to guide operational activities.

### **Design Directions within the Museum**

The study team also noted some unanswered questions about the role of Design Directions (and education programs in general) within the museum, both in terms of the integration of education with other museum functions, and in terms of the relative importance of education to senior management.

### *Prioritizing Education*

The study team heard conflicting comments on the question of where education programs fall on the museum's list of programmatic priorities. The museum's strategic plan does include language about the importance of educational programs, and senior managers have stressed the centrality of education in the museum's mission. Yet some interviewees (including some board members) argued that the museum's *practical* commitment to education did not always match the rhetoric, that education is sometimes shortchanged for resources, and that the current focus on expanding the museum's facilities is likely to further weaken support for the museum's educational mission.

Given this conflicting evidence, the study team must withhold judgment on the facts of the matter. However, disagreements among senior management and board members about the depth of the museum's *practical* commitment to education may need to be discussed in a frank and open manner by the concerned individuals.

### *Integration with the Museum*

While Design Directions has been successful at leveraging its connection with the Cooper-Hewitt in the task of recruiting first-rate designers for offerings, in other ways the program seems detached from the museum. For example, efforts to integrate collections, library resources, exhibitions, and other programs with Design Directions do not appear to be extensive. Further, there appear to be cultural barriers—and in some cases, barriers arising from personal frictions—to cooperation among museum departments in the interest of integrating other museum programs and resources into education programs. However, the recent introduction of Directions peer-to-peer tours and the Design Directions open house at the museum may constitute a step toward addressing this issue.

## Management Issues

A theme underlying many of the concerns noted by the study team was a lack of systemization in planning and administration. This relates to an issue often discussed in the literature on organizational life cycles. In their formative stage, programs are typically structured and administered in a somewhat *ad hoc* manner, as approaches are tested and subsequently discarded or refined. In this stage, a program's conception, implementation, and development are often driven by an individual or small group — “program entrepreneurs” in the jargon—and much of the institutional memory for the program resides informally with these individuals. Design Directions in its rapid growth phase up to FY2001 fits this description.

However, effective management of a mature program typically requires some degree of formalization in goals and planning, as well as systematization in administration. The study team believes that after over six years as an independent program, Design Directions is at the stage where more of such systematization is called for. In many aspects, the program still appears to be run on a somewhat seat-of-the-pants basis.

While this may not immediately affect the quality of educational offerings, it nevertheless has several undesirable effects. For example, it complicates the evaluation of long-run program outcomes, because goals are unclear and information that would allow judgments on outcomes to be made is sketchy or unavailable. It also means the day-to-day administration of the program rests on an unsteady foundation, making it highly vulnerable to disruption in the event of personnel changes. Further, it makes rational planning for the medium- and long terms difficult.

In this section, the issue of systematization will be touched upon in the context of several areas of program administration: tracking alumni, basic record-keeping, outreach efforts, and so on. It should be noted, however, that this underlying theme also factors into issues discussed elsewhere in the “Conclusions”—such as the vagueness of program goals.

## **Tracking Alumni**

As mentioned above, Design Directions students generally regard their experiences with program positively, in the immediate sense that they find the offerings engaging and rewarding. While this is encouraging, it provides little insight into the program's long-run impact on students. Unfortunately, information that might allow for judgments about the long-run outcomes of participation in Design Directions is sparse, scattered, and largely anecdotal.

This has much to do with the current approach to tracking former students, which is highly informal. A more systematic approach to tracking students, and collecting evidence on their activities after they have participated in the program, would have a number of potential benefits. For example, a contact list of individuals who might be willing to contribute to the program's continued success could be compiled. Moreover, the data gathered would be of interest both to other institutions that might wish to model programs on Design Directions, and to funders that require program evaluations.

The study team recognizes that a trade-off exists, in that resources devoted to tracking students are not available for planning and administering program offerings and other important tasks. However, the education department might make a greater effort to explicitly confront this trade-off. Presently, the program operates in an inherited default mode that entails *no* systematic tracking efforts.

## **Record Keeping**

Compiling databases on Design Directions offerings and designers, as well as reconstructing historical information on finances, entailed consulting multiple hard-copy documents that nonetheless left gaps and uncertainties. The data with which the study team ultimately worked was in places unclear, incomplete, or inconsistent. Information on the earlier years of the program under the first program coordinator was particularly hard to come by. The study team can only conclude that comprehensive records have not



been kept in a consistent and easily-accessible form in several important administrative areas.

Basic record keeping is a crucial element of institutional memory, and a necessary foundation for effective management, organizational learning, and accountability, and it should be undertaken systematically. For a program at Design Directions' stage in the life cycle, record keeping on finances, offerings, and designer contacts should be more complete, consistent, and transparent. Records should be easily accessible in electronic as well as hard-copy form.

A senior CHNDM manager indicated to the study team that the museum now plans to bring in an additional administrative assistant for the entire education department, for the purpose of improving the department's record keeping. The study team would suggest that this new administrative assistant might consider the challenge of improving record keeping for Design Directions as part of a wider challenge to establish a consistent department-wide information management system covering all education programs. Such a system could, once up and running, provide (with minimal effort) data such as that requested for this study to senior managers, funders, and future evaluators, as well as program staff.

### **Use of Written Evaluations**

The written student evaluations distributed to Design Directions participants at the end of each offering seem to be used qualitatively and unsystematically by program managers. This is by no means a criticism; the study team agrees it would be unwise to place great weight on modest quantitative differences in ratings made by high school students on their way out the door. Such scores are at best a blunt instrument for gauging participant satisfaction; indeed, scores on the evaluations reviewed by the study team appeared to be mostly clustered in a range where conclusions about differences in student satisfaction would be difficult to draw with any confidence.

However, some offerings did collect scores sufficiently high or low as to indicate something notably “right” or “wrong.” The study team would merely suggest that conspicuous outliers of this sort might be the most promising place to look for useful feedback. It might even be worthwhile to calculate a running median or mean score for students’ quantitative evaluations, and to decide in advance how far away from this the score for a particular offering should be before triggering a more careful review.

Further, it must be borne in mind that written evaluations are obtained only from students who have completed offerings. They can offer no insight into why some students might be so dissatisfied that they do not stay for the duration of an offering. Yet feedback from students who do not complete offerings might be useful for refining the program.

## **Outreach and Recruiting**

### *Students*

The primary instrument of student outreach for the program is the semi-annual poster, detailing the coming semester’s offerings. This is mailed out to approximately 6,500 high schools (including all New York City schools), teachers, parents, designers, and previous Design Directions students.

High school visits are also a part of student outreach, although the frequency and pattern of such visits remains unclear to the study team. There appeared to be a few general rules guiding schools outreach, such as that larger schools and public schools in economically disadvantaged areas are accorded priority. But there appeared to be no clear criteria governing which schools were visited and when. Increasing schools outreach did not appear to be a priority for the current program coordinator, although interviewees’ opinions on the adequacy of current outreach efforts varied.

The dearth of Design Directions information on the CHNDM website and the absence of student outreach through the Web are potentially serious shortcomings, given the heavy

reliance young people place on the Web as a source of information. For example, in a recent talk on diversifying museum audiences presented to the Smithsonian Institution Council, Omar Wasow, an NBC internet analyst and founder of BlackPlanet.com, stressed, “To hook young people, you need to reach them where they ‘live’—which is very much online.” Wasow also noted that recent statistics on the demographics of Web access indicate that the socio-economic “digital divide”—which might be expected to affect much of Design Directions’ target audience—is in fact rapidly closing.<sup>33</sup>

### *Designers*

Outreach efforts to designers appeared somewhat *ad hoc*. Much of the program’s outreach to designers was done through word of mouth and personal contacts, and many members of the design community in New York City are unaware of the opportunity to participate. A recruiting process based largely on the education staff’s rolodex limits the number of designers who are informed about the program, and does not give an equal chance of access to all member of the design community.

Whether this should be considered a problem turns on the answer to a question raised when discussing strategic goals for the program above: what is the balance between serving designers and serving students? If serving designers is regarded as a goal on par (or nearly so) with serving disadvantaged youth, more systematic outreach to the New York City design community might be appropriate, even if this means shifting some resources from implementing offerings.

However, in fairness, it should be noted that addressing this issue in a comprehensive way would require a highly skilled marketing team, plus significant involvement by designers themselves. Realistically, pursuing major outreach efforts to the industry at large is beyond the present capabilities of the education department.

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<sup>33</sup> See the OP&A report, *Increasing and Diversifying Smithsonian Audiences: An Overview of the 2004 Meeting of the Smithsonian Institution Council*, December 2004. Available online at <http://www.si.edu/opanda/Oct04SICmtg.pdf>.

## Planning Offerings

Data on the educational offerings, as well as the opinions expressed in interviews, suggest that the organization of educational offerings is somewhat *ad hoc*. On a more fundamental level, there appears to be little reflection on the issue of how the mix of offerings serves the program's larger goals—in part because those goals remain nebulous.

### *The Trade-off Between Breadth and Depth*

One issue that came up repeatedly in discussions with education department staff, board members, and other stakeholders was the question of the trade-off between “depth” and “reach” in the program's educational offerings. Should the program aim to reach a large number of young people in a relatively superficial way, to give lots of kids a small taste of design? Or should it try to have a greater impact on a smaller number of students?

Currently, some offerings (such as Design Day workshops that may serve 35 kids or more) are “wide and shallow,” providing basic exposure to a topic for a large number of participants and requiring no commitment over time. Others, especially the Van Lier Fellowship and multi-session portfolio workshop, are “narrow and deep” offerings focused on a smaller number of committed participants with a serious interest in a design career. Still others, such as Design Studios, fall somewhere in between.

It is not possible to say which approach would more effective in achieving the program's goals, in the absence of a more explicit statement of what those goals *are*, and in the absence of information on long-run outcomes. However, several education department staff members raised the possibility that the program might indeed benefit from shifting resources toward intensive work with a smaller number of committed students. One reason for this was the frustration repeatedly voiced about the lack of commitment exhibited by some of the more casual program participants.

## *Training and Guidance for Designers*

Designers teaching their first Design Directions offering do not receive systematic guidance on the “dos and don’ts” of program pedagogy, or on the goals and objectives of the program. Instead, such guidance is provided through informal channels such as discussions and e-mail exchanges with the program coordinator. While many designers appreciate this flexibility, such an informal system can leave gaps in the information received by designers concerning how to conduct an offering. Further, it can result in inefficiency in the use of the program coordinator’s time: written guidelines distributed to *all* new program instructors could answer questions that might otherwise have to be discussed in separate exchanges with *each* of them.

## **Targeting Disadvantaged Youth**

While Design Directions’ goals and mission may be somewhat vaguely defined, there is agreement that serving disadvantaged New York City youth is a central part of the program’s *raison d’etre*. Currently, the education department does not collect data on students (such as approximate household income, ethnicity, and household composition) that would make it possible to judge where the benefits of the program are going, in socio-economic terms.<sup>34</sup> Focusing outreach efforts on schools in economically disadvantaged neighborhoods appears to be the main tool for targeting disadvantaged youth, but word of the program has diffused more generally, and some program participants are not disadvantaged.

Allowing some of the program’s benefits to go to non-disadvantaged participants is not inherently problematic, if kept within bounds. In fact, some interviewees commented that the effects of mixing students from different socio-economic backgrounds were, if anything, positive. However, because one of the major justifications for the program turns on its effectiveness in reaching underserved youth, measures to ensure (and

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<sup>34</sup> These comments do not apply to the Van Lier Fellowship program, as the Van Lier students are selected by and work closely with the Design Directions coordinator.

demonstrate) that benefits flow predominantly to this group may be required. Expending considerable resources on a free program that benefits disadvantaged kids may be defensible to funders; devoting the same resources to a free program that primarily benefits students from non-disadvantaged backgrounds is almost certainly *not*—even if these kids appreciate and gain from the opportunity.

## **Resource Issues**

### **Human Resources**

Many of the program's shortcomings can be attributed at least in part to staffing issues, such as lack of clarity about staff roles and responsibilities, inadequate accountability, and lack of coordination (and in some cases cooperation) among staff.

The formal roles of, and relationships among, key members of the department staff—the program coordinator, program assistant, schools programs manager, and department head—sometimes appear to be inoperative in practice and need to be clarified. This raises the question of whether formal relationships should be altered to reflect the practice, or whether the practice should be altered to reflect formal relationships. For example, the study team believes a case could be made for upgrading the formal status of the Design Directions coordinator within the education department, by placing that position at a level in the hierarchy equal, rather than subordinate, to the schools programs manager.

Further, education department interviewees indicated that the decision by senior management to eliminate the schools programs assistant position in FY2002 left the department short on administrative support—a dilemma that is still faced today, and has been alleviated only by an awkward informal sharing of the Design Directions program assistant's time. The planned hire of an administrative assistant for the whole department

may address this concern to some extent, depending upon how this employee's work time is apportioned among the various programs.

### **Financial Resources**

As noted above, Design Directions is heavily dependent upon annual grant funding, in particular from the Altman Foundation, which typically funds a large fraction of Design Directions expenditures. As discussed previously in this report, the education department as a whole is highly dependent upon annual grant funding, by Smithsonian standards.

The department has not run into difficulties getting funds to keep the program running at about the level reached in FY2001, and appears to have a relatively secure relationship with the Altman Foundation. However, the study team believes that if the museum wishes to make a firm commitment to the program, other stable sources of funds should be found. In this connection, several board members interviewed mentioned their hopes of establishing a separate endowment for education programs to provide such a source of funding.

### **Space**

While space was mentioned as a problem by some interviewees, the study team believes that the museum is addressing this issue in a serious way at the present time.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

**Recommendation: A formal, detailed statement of goals for the program should be drafted with input from diverse stakeholders in the education department, the museum, the schools, and the design and funder communities.**

These goals should be rooted in the program’s unique strengths, should address the balance between serving designers and serving students, and should prioritize the various goals that fall under the broad headings of “serving students” and “serving designers.” On the basis of this statement, the issue of “breadth” versus “depth” in program offerings should be assessed, and objectives and strategic plans for the program should be established for periods of one and five years. Day-to-day management should proceed with an awareness of these objectives and plans.



**Recommendation: Supporters of education on the CHNDM board should engage fellow board members and senior management in a frank discussion of their concerns about the museum’s commitment to its education programs, and its use of these programs as a vehicle for gaining increased national prominence.**

Several board members interviewed by the study team were concerned about whether the museum’s practical commitment to its education programs is weakening, in light of other current priorities (especially the proposed renovation and expansion of the museum’s facilities). Board members with such concerns should be free to discuss them openly and constructively with their peers on the board and with senior management. The outcome of such discussions would hopefully include clarification of where education stands on the list of institutional priorities, what level of resources and forms of practical support are appropriate for education, and how major education programs such as Design Directions might be better integrated with other museum programs and activities.

**Recommendation: The education department should maintain a reasonably accurate, periodically updated contact list of students who have completed an agreed-upon number of hours of offerings, and should strive to keep track of these students for several years after high school graduation.**

The foundation for assessing and demonstrating long-term program outcomes must be better tracking of students. Further, the study team would point out that Design Directions alumni are potentially a valuable resource to the museum and the education department, and systematic efforts to cultivate ongoing relationships with them could have considerable benefits. For example, successful alumni might be queried about their willingness to mentor or advise current students, or to assist with outreach and educational offerings. Also worth considering would be some form of voluntary “alumni association,” with an annual event at the museum that would provide former Design Directions students with some sense of ownership and a stake in the future success of the program and the museum.

The study team recognizes that fundamental difficulties complicate efforts to track Design Directions students (such as transience and lack of reliable web access among some of them), and that even with better tracking, evaluating long-run outcomes would pose considerable challenges. However, the study team believes that at the least, valuable qualitative information might be gleaned from collecting information on students' educational and professional progress for a period after leaving the program, and the benefits of maintaining loose ties with a network of alumni could be substantial.

**Recommendation: The education department should make an effort to contact students who attend a single Design Directions offering and do not return for others, and those who begin but fail to complete multi-session offerings, to ascertain why they chose not to return.**

Some of the most useful information for improving the program may come from the students who are least satisfied with it. Thus, the opinions of those who drop out of the program may be of particular interest. The study team realizes that in many cases, students will drop out mainly because of personal reasons or preferences that have nothing to do with the program. Even so, seeking information from such students may be a relatively easy and low-cost way of gaining potentially valuable information.

**Recommendation: The education department should collect additional data—including approximate household income, ethnicity, household composition, and so on—from students.**

If this data indicates that non-disadvantaged individuals constitute a large portion of students (or repeat students), steps should be taken to increase the proportion of disadvantaged students the program attracts and retains. (One step that could be taken without complicating the application process for students would be to

introduce selectivity based on home address or school, which in many cases could serve as reasonable proxies for disadvantaged status.)

**Recommendation: The education department should establish a database of local high schools, with information that would allow their systematic prioritization for outreach efforts (such as number of students, demographics of the geographic area served, and existing visual arts programs).**

Schools that that are assigned the highest priority should receive outreach visits on a regularly scheduled basis, as resources allow. Outreach efforts to other schools should be calibrated on the basis of the priority assigned to each school.

**Recommendation: The education and communications departments should consider how they might use the unique resources of the Web to boost student outreach efforts.**

At a minimum, information about the program on the CHNDM website should be increased and presented in a more visually attractive form. As discussed below, this could also improve outreach efforts to the design community.

**Recommendation: In the short term, and in view of the statement of goals discussed above, the education department should consider introducing a higher level of screening or selectivity into the application process for *some* offerings—and perhaps a set of formal rules governing attendance as well—to weed out students who are unlikely to participate seriously.**

The study team gathered that this is already done at the margins on an informal basis. For example, a student who has failed to attend past offerings in which she was enrolled may be dropped from future offerings, particularly if there is a wait list.

**Recommendation: The education department should organize and maintain a database of designers and design firms in the New York City area, and assemble a promotional kit for outreach mailings to selected recipients.**

In addition, in order to make the program more accessible to the members of design community, detailed information on the program should be featured prominently on the CHNDM website, with contact information for designers who wish to query about participation in the program.

**Recommendation: The education department should assemble an orientation kit for designers doing their first Design Directions offerings, and possibly offer an orientation session.**

This should include a statement of the goals and objectives of the program, a brief discussion of best practices and lessons learned from previous offerings, and guidance on pedagogy and planning an offering. The study team realizes the difficulties of coordinating multiple designers' schedules, but if possible, the education department might also consider organizing an optional training and orientation session at the beginning of each semester, where new and veteran Design Directions designer/facilitators could meet for discussion and questions with program staff.

**Recommendation: A part-time program assistant should be hired immediately to undertake routine administrative tasks.**

Line-item funds currently exist within the Design Directions budget for a part-time program assistant, but these have not been used for several years. Such an assistant should be hired immediately, and where appropriate, tasks currently undertaken by the program coordinator should be delegated to this assistant. Some of the administrative tasks recommended in this study could, once initially set up, be made the responsibility of a program assistant.

**Recommendation: The duties of the program assistant shared between the Design Directions coordinator and schools programs manager should be clearly defined, and adjusted to reflect actual resources allocated from the Design Directions budget.**

The use of the Design Directions program assistant on tasks not directly related to the program—while perhaps viewed as a necessity in light of inadequate departmental support staff—is awkward and needs to be addressed. The study team sympathizes with the department’s difficulties in adjusting to the recent loss of a support staff position, and believes that this is a legitimate subject to broach with senior management. However, in general, the activities of program staff should be closely related to the sources from which they are funded.

**Recommendation: Board members who support education should continue efforts to establish a separate endowment for Cooper-Hewitt education programs.**

Where separate education-oriented funding sources can be identified—that is, sources that can be tapped without cannibalizing the museum’s efforts to raise funds for facilities—interested board members should be free to pursue their vision of an earmarked endowment for the education department. Some part of such an endowment should be devoted to the “institutionalization” of Design Directions (for example, to cover some part of the program coordinator’s salary).

## **APPENDIX A: LIST OF INTERVIEWEES<sup>1</sup>**

### **Cooper-Hewitt Staff and Board**

Agnes Bourne  
Nell Daniel  
Dorothy Dunn  
Alice Gottesmann  
Bonnie Harris  
Monica Hampton  
Paul Herzan  
Ken Miller  
Paul Thompson  
Elizabeth Werbe  
Renee Williams

### **Designers and Design Educators**

Greg Amiriantz  
Caitlin Cahill  
Patrick Douglas  
Allison Duncan  
Bart Haney  
Carole Ann Herman  
Len Hopper  
Octavio Lubrano  
Ellen Lupton  
Jason Mayden  
Pablo Medina  
Trudy Miller  
Christopher Neal  
Bridget Parris  
Tucker Robbins  
Edwin Roses  
Jane Savage  
Birgitta Watz

Formal semi-structured and informal interviews were conducted with participants at the 2004 Summer Design Institute, July 14-16, 2004.

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<sup>1</sup> The names of interviewees who explicitly requested that their comments be kept “off the record” are not listed. In addition, only the names of individuals who were given formal, semi-structured interviews specifically for this project are listed here.

## **Funders**

Laurie Dien  
Karen Rosa

## **Students**

Clifton David Crump  
Kai Jackson  
Emily Lovecchio  
Shaun Modi  
Oran Zahra

Formal semi-structured interviews were conducted with 11 students at the 2004 summer Design Lab, July 14-15, 2004.

Informal interviews were conducted with students at the following offerings:

- “City of Neighborhoods: Designing the High Line,” May 11, 2004
- “Windows Under Construction by You: Crate and Barrel,” May 20, 2004
- Portfolio workshop, October 4, 2004
- “Fabrications,” October 5, 2004

## **APPENDIX B: SOURCES OF FINANCIAL DATA**

### **FY 1999**

“Design Directions: Fiscal Year 1999 Funding and Expenditures,” attachment to e-mail from Design Directions program coordinator Bonnie Harris to OP&A staff.

### **FY 2000**

“Design Directions: Fiscal Year 2001 Budget,” appendix to correspondence between CHNDM education department head Dorothy Dunn and Pinkerton Foundation. No date.

“Design Directions: Proposed Fiscal Year 2001 Budget,” appendix to memorandum on grant proposal to Pinkerton Foundation, dated March 13, 2000.

“Design Directions: Fiscal Year 2001 Budget,” appendix to memorandum on grant proposal to the Sundra Foundation, dated February 20, 2001.

### **FY 2002**

“Design Directions: Proposed Fiscal Year 2002 Budget,” appendix to memorandum on grant proposal to the Sundra Foundation, dated February 20, 2001.

“Design Directions: Fiscal Year 2002 Budget,” appendix to draft status report to Pinkerton Foundation Report. No date.

### **FY 2003**

“Design Directions: Fiscal Year 2003 Funding,” attachment to e-mail from Design Directions program coordinator Bonnie Harris to OP&A staff.

“Expenses for Design Directions,” appendix to Design Directions Program Report to Pinkerton Foundation, dated September 15, 2003.

### **FY 2004**

“Appendix C: Design Directions 2004 Budget,” appendix to grant proposal to Altman Foundation, dated November 3, 2003.



**FY 2005**

“Design Directions: Fiscal Year 2005 Funding,” attachment to e-mail from Design Directions program coordinator Bonnie Harris to OP&A staff.

“Appendix C: Design Directions 2005 Budget,” document given by Design Directions program coordinator Bonnie Harris to OP&A staff on October 5, 2005.

## APPENDIX C

### Design Directions Funding and Planned Allocations, FY 1999-FY2000

