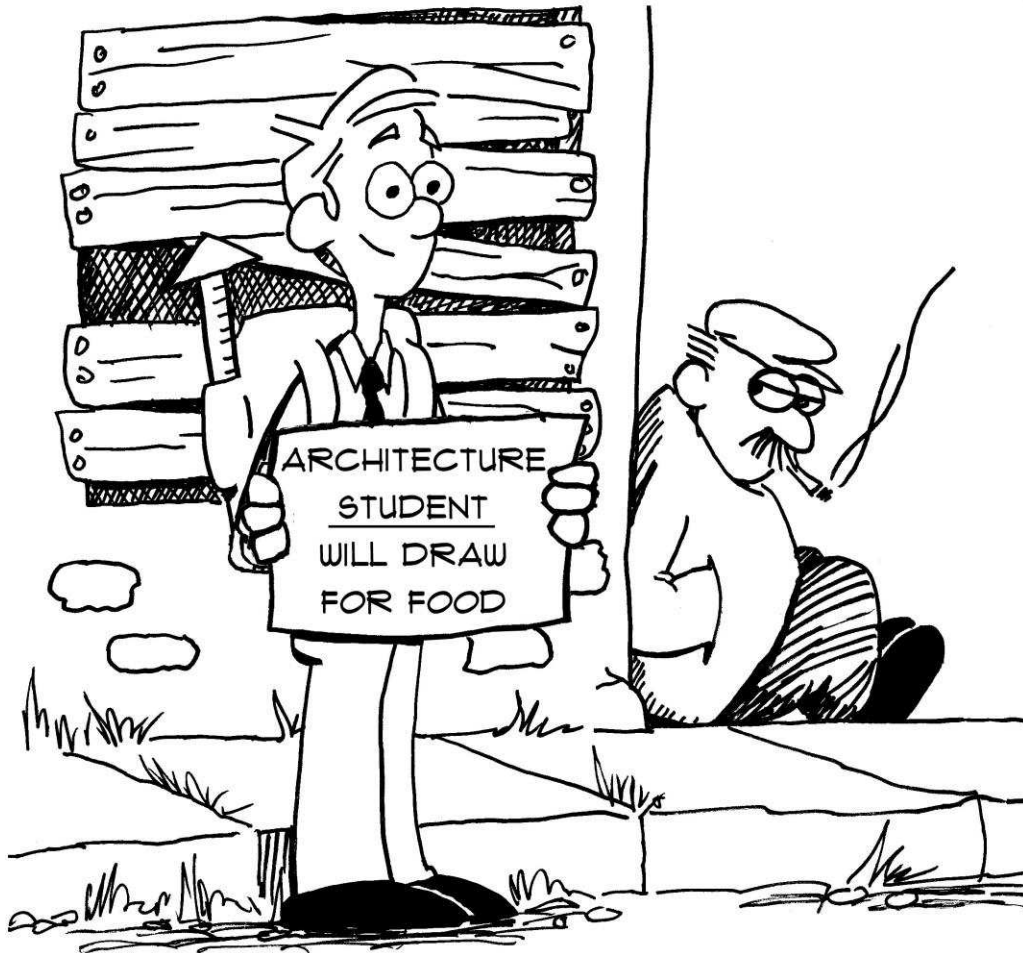


Working During Architecture School



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There are many decisions that you need to make before you attend architecture school. You need to figure out what school to attend, where to live, how to pay tuition, what meal plan you want, etc. As if that isn't overwhelming enough, you will also need to make many important decisions after you arrive on campus.

One of the decisions that you will probably wrestle with at one time or another is whether or not you should work while going to school. And, if you decide to work, should you take a work-study job on campus, fill out an application at Starbucks or compete for an internship?

This book is designed to help you weigh the pros and cons of working during school and to help you select the type of job that fits best with your studies and other obligations.

The Concept of Bandwidth

Before I talk about working during architecture school, I need to discuss bandwidth.

The word **bandwidth** means the amount of energy or mental capacity used to handle a situation. We all know that the human brain can only handle so much information, problem solving and processing before it starts to get fried.

Architecture school is a series of challenges that get harder and harder as you move through the program. Professors regularly request that you deliver work that requires a ridiculous amount of bandwidth. The reason for doing this is to train architecture students to stretch and push the limits of what they can handle and achieve.

Your brain is like a muscle that needs to be stretched. This is why architecture school is often a life-changing experience for the people that complete it.

Taking on extra commitments, making money and working for people all require significant bandwidth from your mental capacity. A common mistake architecture students make is not prioritizing how their mental bandwidth is being spent.

So much growth happens during architecture school. If becoming an Architect is truly something that means a lot to you, I encourage you to think about how you spend your mental bandwidth and what you spend it on.

Getting Experience in a Firm—The Double-Edged Sword

Working at an architecture firm during school can be a double-edged sword. Allow me to explain:

- It can be sooo valuable to have experience in an architecture office. The skills learned by working in an office could typically give you a leg up over everyone else in your design studio. Most importantly, the experience of academia is drastically different than working in the real world. It's important as a student to know what you're getting into and see what life will look like after college.
- I have also seen students become so distracted by having their first professional job that they missed out on many opportunities in school. At my school, the

Working During Architecture School

architecture students who were working in firms typically spent less time in the studio and less time working on their projects.

Most architecture students just don't realize that they have a very long road of working in offices ahead of them.

That being said, always pay close attention to how your bandwidth is being used. If you can learn how to focus and get shit done, there will be endless jobs, projects and opportunities coming your way for the rest of your life.

Getting a Job

This is the most obvious way to make money. In the world of entrepreneurship, this is referred to as **trading your time for money**.

In my opinion, there are two types of jobs:

Architecture Jobs and **Non-Architecture jobs**.

Let's take a look at each one.

Architecture Jobs

Here's the great news—all busy architecture firms need staff to help them in exchange for a slightly higher than minimum wage pay. Being an architecture intern is an excellent opportunity to advance your skills and start gaining experience. Most importantly, working as an intern will allow you to start learning how an architecture firm works. A significant amount of valuable learning takes place by just being in the office.

Office help or entry-level jobs start at minimum wage (or maybe slightly more) and involve running errands for the office. It may also involve making prints of drawings, digging out rolls of drawings from the office archives or shuttling people around town.

As you get more experience, you'll start drafting, model building, measuring and taking on projects. Working for an architecture firm is an excellent opportunity to advance your skills and start gaining experience.

There is a fantastic book called "[inside: Architecture and Design: A guide to the practice of architecture](#)" that does a wonderful job of explaining how an architecture office operates and provides tons of valuable information to anyone just beginning their career in the profession.

Pros of Architecture Jobs:

- **Start building your resume.** Working as an intern is a crucial part of every Architect's education. Experience is everything. You could even start working on your IDP hours toward licensing while you are a student. That's what I did.
- **Ability to try out many firms with no strings attached.** Being a student intern involves less commitment and allows you to get inside many different types of firms, thereby gaining a more holistic view of the profession. This is gold.
- **It will help you with school.** The skills I learned in the office as a student intern ALWAYS helped me to be a better architecture student.

Cons of Architecture Jobs:

- **They money isn't great at first.** It takes training and experience before any intern can start to providing value to an architecture firm. Generally speaking, most firms usually cannot afford to pay very well for employees with minimal experience.
- **Requires significant bandwidth.** If your studies take up most of your bandwidth, working in an architecture firm may not be the best option for you. The biggest challenge I had with taking on architecture job while I was a student was that, as I became more valuable to the office, I was increasingly put into situations where my work at the firm interfered with my education.
- **Firms may not recognize that you're a student.** When I was an architecture student, I worked at two firms that tried to make me feel guilty when it was time for me to move on. I was also being paid as a student intern and doing the work of someone who was compensated at a much higher rate. When I left, it was really more the firms' loss than mine. Had the firms offered me more money, I would still have left because it was time to move on and channel more of my energy into school. And yes, significantly better opportunities came my way after I left those employers.

Non-Architecture Jobs

Non-architecture jobs consist of any type of job that doesn't involve working in an architecture office or a firm. Maybe that is bartending, waiting tables, working in a bike shop, grocery store, bagel shop, tow-truck company or wherever. These types of jobs can also be extremely valuable to an architecture student.

When you are in school, getting away from the studio and connecting with non-architecture people is sooo incredibly important. Try to think of your non-architecture Boss as your future client, because they will be one day. Understanding how the world

works is fundamental to being a great architect—and **architects don't become great by only thinking about or focusing on architecture all the time.**

Pros of Non-Architecture Jobs:

- **The money could be really good.** Depending on what kind of work you find, you could make significantly more money than a talented student intern working for an architecture firm.
- **Connecting with the non-architecture world.** For architecture students, it can be really healthy to connect with non-architecture students. These types of jobs provide excellent opportunities for that.
- **Freeing up bandwidth.** Depending on the job you land, it could free up a significant amount of bandwidth that you could then channel back into your studies.

Cons of Non-Architecture Jobs:

- **Not actively working on your professional resume.** Non-architecture jobs could be of little importance to your future architecture industry employers.
- **Could distract you from architecture.** The money, fewer problems to deal with and an easier lifestyle could convince you to abandon architecture completely.

EBay and Amazon

When I was a student, I took the time to learn how to sell stuff on eBay and Amazon. Everything I needed was already at my fingertips, including cameras, computers, boxes, a post office, time, the ability to learn, and most importantly, tons of stuff to sell.

I started with selling junk that my family and I had laying around the house. I then started selling stuff for friends and splitting the profits. Eventually, I found a local business that had a ton of valuable merchandise to liquidate. I sold everything they had online and split the earnings with them. I made several thousand dollars doing this over the course of six months.

What I love most about eBay and Amazon is that it is easy money. I love architecture, but as an architect, I get paid to be a problem solver. And being a problem solver means sometimes dealing with really annoying problems. By selling stuff online, I can make easy money, not have to directly trade time for dollars and not deal with any problems—which can feel really good when you're exhausted.

When I was in college selling on eBay and Amazon, people were still on the fence about buying stuff online. In the past few years, the general public has become overly

comfortable with spending their money on the Internet. Amazon offers their popular [Amazon Prime program](#) and, now more than ever, there are very few barriers for anyone who wants to make money by selling stuff online.

Pros of EBay and Amazon:

- **Work at will.** Make your own hours and do as much or as little as your school schedule allows.
- **Easy Money.** No bosses, annoying clients, commuting, office dress codes or difficult problems to solve.
- **Ability to make a lot of easy money.** Depending on how you do it and what you have to sell, you can really cash in.

Cons of EBay and Amazon:

- **Big learning curve.** It takes a while to learn all the rules and get up to speed with how these platforms work.
- **Can be mind-numbing.** A problem I have always had with this kind of work is that it isn't mentally stimulating. If I do it too much, I get really bored or, worse, start to feel sick, similar to when I watch too much crappy TV.
- **Learning to streamline the process.** The faster you can take something, process it, get it sold, shipped and collect payment, the more money you can earn. It took me a ton of trial and error to learn how to become efficient with selling online.

Freelancing

Thanks to the Internet, our world is hyper-connected. Did you know that Web sites such as [Elance.com](#), [Upwork.com](#) and [Fiverr.com](#) are connecting clients with freelancers who specialize in all sorts of areas and provide a wide range of services?

For instance, I regularly hire an architecture student in Italy to do sketchup 3D renderings for me. He is smart, fast and cheap. Most importantly, my clients love his drawings. What takes him two hours would take me two days. The cost of paying the guy, who is already an expert in this topic, for two hours of work is money well spent.

I also regularly hire freelancers to proofread my blogposts, fix YoungArchitect.com when I mess it up, research things on the Internet for me and fill in the temporarily gaps of whatever skills I wish I had at the moment. Contrary to what I learned in architecture school, I can't do everything well—so I hire freelancers when I need help.

Working During Architecture School

The Web sites I mentioned above have opened the floodgates on finding freelance work and the possibilities are endless.

Pros of Freelancing:

- **Your portfolio already exists.** I bet your existing portfolio as an architecture student is better than many of your competitors who do not have valuable architecture training.
- **Work as much or as little as you wish.** As with eBay and Amazon, you can turn this on type of work on and off depending on your schedule.
- **The competition.** There are many untalented, untrained people with communication barrier issues all trying to find work using these sites. I like to think an intelligent architecture student has a leg up on the competition.

Cons of Freelancing:

- **The competition.** Depending on the specific services that you plan to offer, the freelance marketplace could be crowded. Foreign exchange rates could work against you depending on where you and your clients live.

Working for the Architecture School

For any architecture school to run effectively, it always needs student workers who can accept responsibility and be dependable.

Of all the jobs I listed above, I think this is the very best job for an architecture student. This is actually how I made the bulk of the money that I had during college. I had sooo many jobs in the architecture building:

- I worked in the **library** during a summer doing filing and pulling architecture books that haven't been checked out in years.
- I worked in the **wood shop**, which gave me 24-hour access. This job made me a very powerful person in the design studio, especially at 3 a.m.
- My architecture school had two galleries with rotating exhibitions. **I put together many of those exhibitions** and got to work with several well-known artists and Architects.
- I **organized lectures**, checked people in and made sure the lecturers had everything they needed.

Working During Architecture School

- I was a **teacher assistant** for the freshman students.
- During my school's NAAB accreditation, several other students and I **designed and built** a 10,000-square-foot exhibition of student work. This was by far my largest project for the school.

I got paid \$10/hour for all of this work. During the course of my five-year degree, this amount of money really added up. I often made my own hours and did a lot of this work in the middle of the night.

Other Things to Consider

Go to the BAC

Making money while dealing with the demands architecture school is one of the greatest challenges a student can take on. The Boston Architecture Center's (The BAC) whole curriculum is based around working and studying. Students work 40 hours a week and then study and go to school at night.

Because all the students are part time, it typically takes a BAC student about 10 years to get a five-year BARCH degree. I attended the BAC program for my first two years of architecture school and found it to be too stressful, for the long haul. Eventually, I decided I wanted to go to school full time, so I transferred out.

Many BAC students follow the same path that I did. However, many don't. I have learned that the people who graduate from the BAC are always damn good Architects.

The BAC is fantastic program for the people who can manage it and succeed.

Working Overtime

Every Architect works overtime at some point, it's just the nature of the work and the type of deadlines Architects face.

Architecture students should be aware that working overtime has historically been a very heated conversation in the profession of architecture. The controversy is always around the questions of:

- **How much overtime as acceptable?**
- **Are employees being compensated for their overtime?**
- **Should management be hiring more staff instead of regularly working employees with overtime?**

Firms sometimes look at their salaried employees as an opportunity to get them to work much more than 40 hours week.

Working During Architecture School

When you graduate architecture school and start looking for a full time position ALWAYS ask how much overtime is involved in the positions you are applying for. Some firms are notorious for working overtime and others not so much.

Every architecture job will require overtime at some point, but I have never worked for a company that consistently had us working overtime or without compensation of pay or giving additional paid time off.

Beware of overtime in the architecture profession. If you find yourself giving more overtime then you feel comfortable with, you need to speak up or possibly find a new firm that is a much better fit for you.

Pay Attention to Taxes

*Disclosure: I'm an Architect—not an accountant.

Every year during college when I had a real job, I got a huge tax return. I guess that's because I didn't make enough taxable income and I was a full time student. Getting a nice tax return always helped me to keep things afloat during architecture school.

I had a friend during college who worked for a firm that paid her as an independent contractor. Therefore, the firm did not deduct any taxes from her pay, and at the end of the year my friend was rudely surprised when she needed to pay \$500 in taxes. And, depending on how much money you make as a freelancer or independent contractor, you may also be required to make quarterly estimated tax payments.

It's always worth talking to someone who understands taxes before you start making any money, particularly if you will be working as a freelancer or independent contractor.

Conclusion

A work-study arrangement can provide many benefits for architecture students. But, depending on your school schedule, the type of job, your ability to multitask and how much bandwidth you have available, working can present significant challenges.

Before embarking on any money-making venture, you should honestly assess your priorities, financial situation and school workload to determine if you should—or need to—work at all. If you determine that working is the best option, you can then figure out and how much time and bandwidth you have available and what type of job would be the best fit for you.