arcCA asked each professional architecture school in the state to identify and describe a program or initiative that aptly characterizes the philosophy, attitude, direction, or emphasis of the school. Our goal was to avoid generalities, instead presenting concrete instances that will suggest meaningful differences among the institutions. Nine of the ten schools responded. These are their responses, in order of the age of the architecture program—founding dates indicated in parentheses—eldest first.

UC Berkeley (1903): The Cal Design Lab @ Wurster
Jennifer Wolch, Dean

Over the past decade, something called “design thinking” has swept business, engineering, and other professions the world over. Now, at Berkeley’s College of Environmental Design (CED), faculty and students are coming together with others from across campus—entrepreneurs, information technologists, industrial designers, and engineers—to work on critical design challenges. The medium is the studio environment—nothing new for architects, planners, or landscape architects, but decidedly different from the traditional environments of other professionals. The experiment has been crafted to understand whether disciplinary cross-talk, exposure to a wide variety of design methods and ways of thinking and doing, and collaborative work around prototypes and projects can lead to a new form of educational experience and design practice.

The experiment started when I was approached by CED alumnus and lecturer Clark Kellogg, along with Sara Beckman and John Danner from the Haas School of Business. Clark is an architect, designer, and expert on innovation; Sara pioneered UC’s popular course on product design, along with her colleague Alice Agogino from Mechanical Engineering; and John is a management guru and senior fellow leading courses in new venture development and global poverty. They wanted “think-do” space for a collaborative design studio: for classes, informal group projects, and faculty seminars. In the face of their energy, enthusiasm, and vision, I quickly carved out a corner of the 5th floor studio and said: Go for it!

Because enthusiasm is infectious, the deans of the Haas School of Business and the Information School also signed on to participate in the experiment. Dean Rich Lyons of the Haas School of Business recognized that this type of space would afford MBA students a chance to work in a completely different way, not only because it encourages collaborative thought but also because
it allows the persistence of visual information over time. After several iterations, we settled on a name: the Cal Design Lab. The 5th floor space is the Cal Design Lab @ Wurster, but we hope that eventually—with community and corporate support—there will be Cal Design Lab facilities in other corners of the campus, creating a network of intersecting groups focused on design in its many instantiations.

In July, a charrette was held to think through how to equip the space for future use. Faculty and staff from CED’s Department of Architecture, Haas School of Business, Information School, and College of Engineering participated, as well as senior staff from Steelcase, keen to nurture an experiment into future learning styles and their physical environments. Even without fancy furnishings, however, students were already being exposed to design thinking in practice; last spring, Jon Pittman, a senior executive from Autodesk, taught his course on the role of design as a competitive strategy there. This year, introductory courses, mini-courses, and project-based courses from architecture, engineering, and business will cycle through the space. Student teams are apt to prototype green products, frame innovative business ventures, craft social marketing campaigns, collaborate around design competitions, and more.

The Cal Design Lab @ Wurster will also be the locus of cross-disciplinary faculty seminars focused on the design process. This effort builds on CED’s tradition of scholarship on design theory and methods; in the 1960s, Professor of Architecture Horst Rittel coined the idea of “wicked problems” and used systems theory and data to understand how designers crafted solutions to them. The seminars’ goal is ambitious: how can we retrieve the still-powerful pieces of this scholarly legacy, while recognizing that today’s thinking has changed under the influence of subsequent intellectual currents and a communications revolution that necessarily alter our understanding of how designers think about problems?

Cal Poly San Luis Obispo (1964): Professional Studio
Henri de Hahn, Department Head

Cal Poly is heir to the French polytechnic education, one that finds a balance between theory and practice. This dual identity remains at the core of an architectural education that is committed to nurturing the practice and practices of architecture. In 2005, the department set in place an innovative professional off-campus program that responds to emerging trends in the profession.

A Professional Studio, a collaboration between the Architecture Department and an architectural firm, grew out of conversations with the KTGY Group, Inc. and developed into the quarter long placement of students in firms. During the quarter, the students work as paid co-op employees and are taught a fourth year design studio by firm members.

The program provides students with professional work experience and financial support; a comprehensive design experience informed by the firm’s deep knowledge of a building type, design philosophy, and processes; and an immersive experience in the profession of architecture. Students are involved in co-op work about 24 hours per week and in design studio about 16 hours per week, with evenings and weekends available for additional work on design projects.

The first Professional Studios were offered by KTGY during the 2005-2006 academic year. WATG of Irvine joined for the 2006-2007 academic year, and since then LPA of Irvine, Roesling Nakamura + Terada Architects of San Diego, Zimmer Gunsul Frasca Architects of Los Angeles, and Gensler of Santa Monica have joined the program. Firms typically participate in the program for one or two quarters each year and move in and out of the program as their workload permits. We are fortunate to have the long-term commitment from firms that allows us to offer multiple Professional Studios as an ongoing part of our curriculum.

A Cal Poly faculty member works with the identified firm members to develop the design problem and mentors them in course organization and teaching. The faculty member visits the firm for a mid-term evaluation of student progress and to provide support for the firm members regarding teaching issues. At the end of the quarter, the faculty member, firm members, and students make a presentation.