

REPORT

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PSSD

ADVISORY BOARD MEETING

Milano Bovisa Campus November 28th, 2016

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Introduction.

The “PSSD Advisory Board” is an initiative of the Direction of the Master of Science program in Product Service System Design and of the Direction of the School of Design of Politecnico di Milano. Its aim is to provide non-binding strategic advice to the master programme, with particular regard to the interpretation of today designer skills and the identification of opportunities and expectations of the job context, in order to better define the profile of the graduate student and therefore of the training programme the master provides.

Therefore, PSSD Advisory Board on the one hand is aimed at supporting the teaching staff at Polimi to understand what companies, design agencies and other design related organisations are requiring from young graduates, and, on the other, thinking and promoting together with the School fresh opportunities for students, during their academic career (workshops, projects, internships, etc.) and afterwards (real job positions).

By creating a community of interest around the Master Degree, the PSSD Advisory Board aims to support overall a better training that is up-to-date, centred on the requests of the market but also capable of proposing new visions for future design professionals.

Advisory Board Members

Currently, the PSSD Advisory Board counts more than 40 members, belonging to different companies, design agencies and organisations. Almost all of them have already experience in working with the School of Design at Polimi.

One of the main reasons for their collaboration with the Master program lays in the interest to find brilliant students and young professionals capable of bringing new ideas and approaches into their respective work environments. Additionally, the PSSD Master Direction deems that the Advisory Board could have a crucial role in exposing the young talents educated in PSSD to the experience of these companies in delivering products and services for real users in the real market, so to merge a more traditional way of learning in the classroom with a more experimental one based on field activities and project-based learning.

1st meeting.

On November 28th, the first meeting of the PSSD Advisory Board has been organized.

Participants have met at the Bovisa Campus of Politecnico di Milano to share objectives and insights on the intentions of the Advisory Board itself.

The schedule of the meeting was the following: an introduction about the reasons and goals of the project, an overview about Politecnico School of Design and the Master Degree in Product Service System Design, a focus on the course itself (what PSSD means, examples of what can be considered a PSS, values and approaches, academic offering).

In the presentation, particular attention was paid to the journey of students in the 2 years of Master, where the second year is partially flexible because of the choices of the students to study abroad: Erasmus Exchange, Double Degree Programs (Politong and PSSD&ME), internship.

Further, statistics on job placements have been shown and discussed: **one year after graduation, 93% of PSSD students have a job.** Of these, 82,1% are employed and 17,9% start their own business and are self-employed.

Within those who have been employed, 78,4% works outside Italy and the 67,7% works in small companies (1-49 employees), the 22,6% in medium companies (50-499), the 6,7% works in big companies (+500).

PRODUCT SERVICE SYSTEM DESIGN

Employment Statistic 2016

Master of Science graduates interviewed 12 months after graduation

Master of Science graduates in Communication Design at Politecnico di Milano were 82 from Bovisa campus in 2014. Total interviews: 44, equal to 53,7% out of total graduates.

Population covered



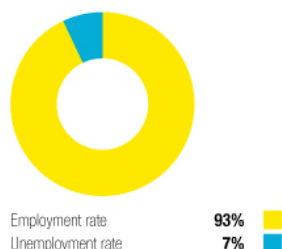
Total graduates

82

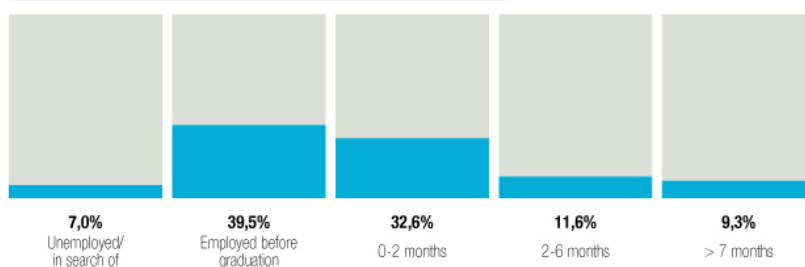
Graduates interviewed

44

Employment situation



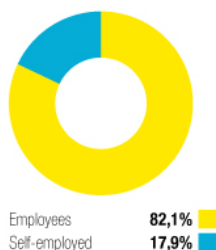
How long it took them to find first employment



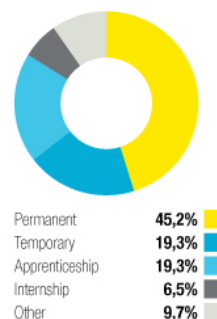
Monthly average net wage



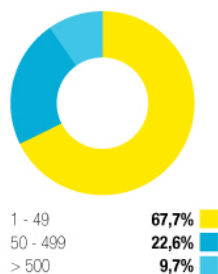
Type of activity



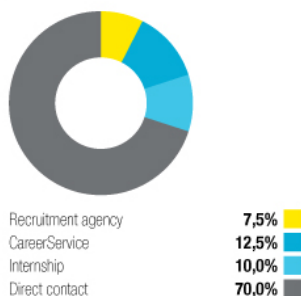
Contract type



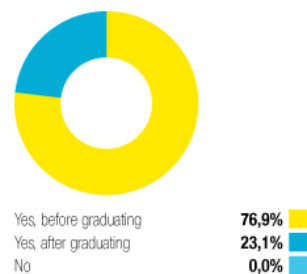
Employer size (n. of people)



How they found their first employment



Has carried out an internship



Employment Statistics, Career Service – Politecnico di Milano.

Charts from the latest Official First Employment Survey of Politecnico di Milano, carried out yearly by the University Assessment Commission in collaboration with the Career Service and AlumniPolimi Association.

Among employees, again, the 39,5% found a job before graduating, the 32,7% within two months after graduation, the 11,6% within 6 months, and the 9,6% has taken more than 7 months to find a job.

Finally, a list of frequent job titles (checked on June 2016) found on LinkedIn looking at graduates' profiles has been shown. The most common are: Product manager, Project manager, Service designer, UX designer, Strategic designer, Product and Experience designer, Product and Brand designer, Interaction designer. These seem to be rather more related to the content and process flow (horizontal competences) rather than to the operational part (vertical competences). These titles show what students tell about themselves.

What do **companies** say about PSSD graduates?

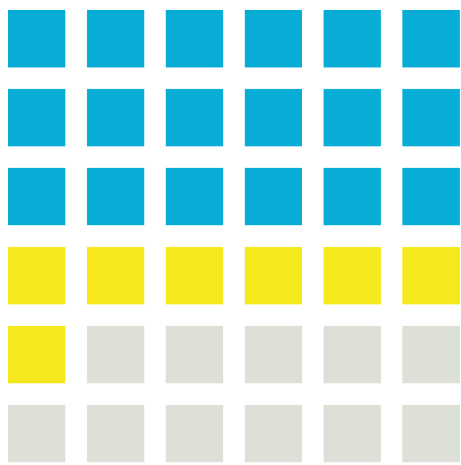
This has been the focus of the first of two **workshop activities**, dealing with understanding the ideal profile of a PSSD student. The second has dealt with the possibility of establishing future collaborations (workshops, sponsorships, internships, etc.).

At the end of each activity participants have been asked to take part in a **debate**, in order to share thoughts and ask questions to the audience.

Activity 1

Total amount of participants

36



Have already worked with PSSD students

18

Have never worked with PSSD students

7

No answer given

11

The activity, focused on the expectation of companies on students' knowledge and personal characteristics, was organised in two parts. The **first part** regards companies' previous experience with them:

Have the participants ever related with PSSD students? Have they ever worked with some of them? And if so, what was the role of the students inside the company?

7 out of 36 participants say that they have never worked with PSSD students whereas the majority, 18, have already worked with them.

From the experience of the latter, the students were mainly in charge of UX design, Service design, Interaction design, Research, Event planning, Design thinking education. Their roles in the organization were many and different. Some explanations coming from the participants are:

"Service designer, Transdisciplinary design, building bridges between disciplines, combining experience, service, space, brand, product in one experience" Sigurdur Thorsteinsson, Design Group Italia;

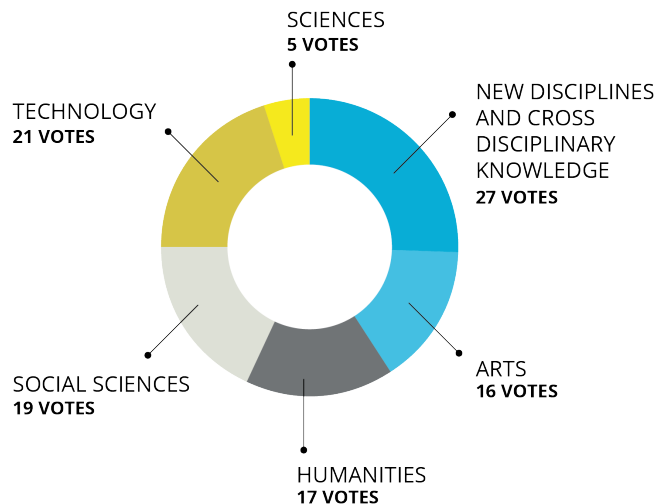
"A professional that is able to understand the environment where he has to work, and by listening, researching, and using the right human resources he is able to move from an idea to a real project" Stefania Scolamiero, Abstract;

"Manage internal and external resources in order to design the forces that creates / shape the full customer experience" Stefano Carmi, Autogrill;

someone that ***"is able to bring attention to needs of the people, with methods and ability to listen"***, Daniele Vitali, Spark Reply.

The roles attributed by companies to PSSD students are in general more related to the intangible value of the project, to the human understanding and to the coordination of a process. This is coherent to how the students describe their job positions in their curricula.

Educational background: complementary competences to design



How the participants voted among the options given.

The **second part** of the first activity was aimed at collecting the preferences of participants in terms of competences and personal characteristics of graduates: what do companies expect from PSSD students? What kind of skills and attitude do they look for? What kinds of experiences are considered important?

As it turns out, the most interesting seems to be Technology, followed Social Sciences and Humanities. Nevertheless, the **“New disciplines and cross disciplinary knowledge: Complexity Theory, Complex systems, Multidisciplinary approach, Transdisciplinary approach, Sustainability Science, Ergonomics, Information/Communication Theory, Public Speaking”** got the majority of votes, 27, with a

particular interest in multidisciplinary approach, transdisciplinary approach, public speaking and complex systems.

Other suggestions from the participants have been: content strategy, organization and management, data and algorithms, economics business and budgeting, coding and IT, behavioural modelling and change management, ethics.

Concerning **personal choices and interests** as well as previous jobs and occupations, the most various preferences have been collected.

All kinds of job experiences are appreciated, as long as **“they were exposed to the complexity of organizations”**, as Fabio Di Liberto, from Isko, remarks. These experiences do not necessarily have to concern the design field: freelancing, startup, volunteering in a NGO or in a non-profit organization, social impact activities, sale assistant, customer service and customer care clerk. It appeared that empathy and ability to understand clients is essential: indeed, Fabrizio Pierandrei, from Paco Design Collaborative, says **“Any experience in which they deal with people (not stupidly staying in an office)”**.

Another valuable trait is showing a strong passion that defines better who the candidate is: **“Being passionate of something beyond the job!”** as Chiara Torti, from Spark Reply, says.

Teamwork is considered fundamental: as Ilaria Morganti, Mare Culturale Urbano says **“whichever kind of experience that made the candidate able to manage a job relation, relate with a team”** and deal with other peers, in order to achieve results. Teamwork can be applied to many circumstances: from university projects, to jams and workshops, from theatre school (that is related also with the expertise in storytelling and speech), to sports. Experiences abroad emerged as well: whereas related with travels, job or studies, travelling appears as an important feature. Further, participants are very interested in the fields of data (big data, data science, data analysis, IT) and business (marketing, economics, trends analysis). Previous experiences in project management and deeper technical knowledge is, clearly, a reason of distinction.

Skills: The suggested hard (in blue) and soft (in yellow) skills , that a Product Service System Designer should have.

LEADERSHIP	FLEXIBILITY	CURIOSITY	
	PROBLEM SOLVING	TEAM BUILDING SKILLS	MULTIDISCIPLINARITY
	STORYTELLING		
	IMPROVIZATION	EMPATHY	

LANGUAGES	3D MODELING	INTERACTION DESIGN		
	MICRO ECONOMICS		SOCIAL MEDIA MANAGEMENT	
	BUSINESS MODELING			DESIGN THINKING
	UX VISUAL STORYTELLING			

Participants have also been asked to indicate the most interesting **soft skills** and hard skills a PSSD graduate should have. Between the soft skills, the most recurring ones have been: storytelling, problem solving, improvisation, flexibility, team building, open minded attitude, curiosity, leadership, creativity, multidisciplinary, empathy, strategic thinking, analytical skills, visualization of complex systems.

Concerning **hard skills**, the most valuable seemed to be: economics and micro economics, business modelling, social media management, visual storytelling, interaction design, UX, CX, design thinking methodology, 3D modelling, Microsoft, languages, anthropology, social science, data science /management, IT competences, KPI metrics.

Appealing categories of interests and passions



International mobility 16
Research passionate 26
Technology geek 14

The final part of the exercise requested participants to rank the chosen topics (of the Realm of Interests and Passions they would have liked the candidate to have), and therefore “research passionate” gained the first position with 26 votes, “international mobility” was second with 16 votes, and “technology geek” was last with 14 votes.

Concerning students’ personal attitude, the most interesting seemed to be “experimental mind-set” and “social intelligence”, followed by “emotional intelligence”, and “creativity”, whereas the less interesting is “theoretical mind-set”, eighth position.

These two very different results might seem contradictory. If on the one hand, the most requested approach is “research passionate”, on the other hand the less interesting personal feature is “theoretical mind-set”. What does this mean? Taking into consideration what participants have said is very relevant here.

Stefano Carmi, from Autogrill, expressed his point of view about the ability of the PSSD program in giving a specific mind-set to students, that allows them to **“look at things and analyse the phenomena”** in an interesting way.

Alessandro Masserdotti, from DOT DOT DOT, says that PSSD designers should **“learn a little bit of everything”**.

Raffaele Boiano, from Fifth Beat, remarks how PSSD designers have difficulties in considering themselves experts in a specific subject. Nevertheless, this is not a flaw: indeed, they have the characteristics of being the “glue” of a project team, the person that makes everyone communicate and collaborate, **“they need to be the facilitators”**.

“Research Passionate” + “Social intelligence” + “Experimental mind-set” are the key features of the PSS designer: “Research passionate” indicates someone that is curious about the workings of the world and uses different tools to find out; “Social intelligence” refers to the ability in understanding people’s needs, not just as single identities but as communities; “Experimental mind-set” is related to the approach to work, and indicates the importance of prototyping and testing draft ideas directly with users.

During the debate, other interesting lacks and best practices of the PSSD graduates emerged. One of the most important is that **“PSSD students cannot explain what they are able to do, what is their job. Neither the majority of companies knows this professional figure; indeed, PSSD students are usually used to train the HR departments!”** says Fabio Di Liberto, adjunct professor in Politecnico and Brand Director of Isko. Stefano Carmi, Autogrill, adds that **“Companies still don’t understand what a Service Designer is, so they don’t know if they need it or not”**. Raising awareness of their capabilities has to be one of the objectives. On one hand, if they don’t know who they are, they cannot promote themselves correctly; on the other hand, if companies have never heard about this role, they can’t imagine the potential benefits that they could acquire. It is very important to work in both directions.

Another pain point concerns the relationship between PSSD students and other workers in the team. If, as mentioned above, PSS designers are “the glue of the team”, and “they need to know a little bit of everything”, it is important that PSSD students **“cross with other students from different disciplines”**, as Matteo Vignoli, from University of Modena and Reggio Emilia, suggests. Making PSSD students working with other people with different backgrounds, (and this means different mind-sets), would make them more flexible and would train them for the real world, where they will have to face the complexity of dealing with a team of people that don’t speak the same language.

Finally, the topics of aesthetic and visualization have been faced. **“Aesthetics in the digital world needs the same feeling as in the tangible world”** says Klaus-Peter Roehler, regional CEO of Allianz: **“Creativity is important, communication aesthetic is very important”** says Stefano Carmi, Autogrill. In a world that is switching from product to services, the visualization of the intangible experience is essential to comprehend the value proposition. So, beside the fact that things have to work beautifully, they also need to look beautiful: this dimension has not to be forgotten, because a pleasant visualization helps with a more efficient delivery.

Matteo Vignoli, from the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia and from Epoca, had more than 35 students as interns. From his experience, he underlined that one of the best achievements had been to make PSSD students work with business and technology experts: the mix of those three backgrounds generated great results.

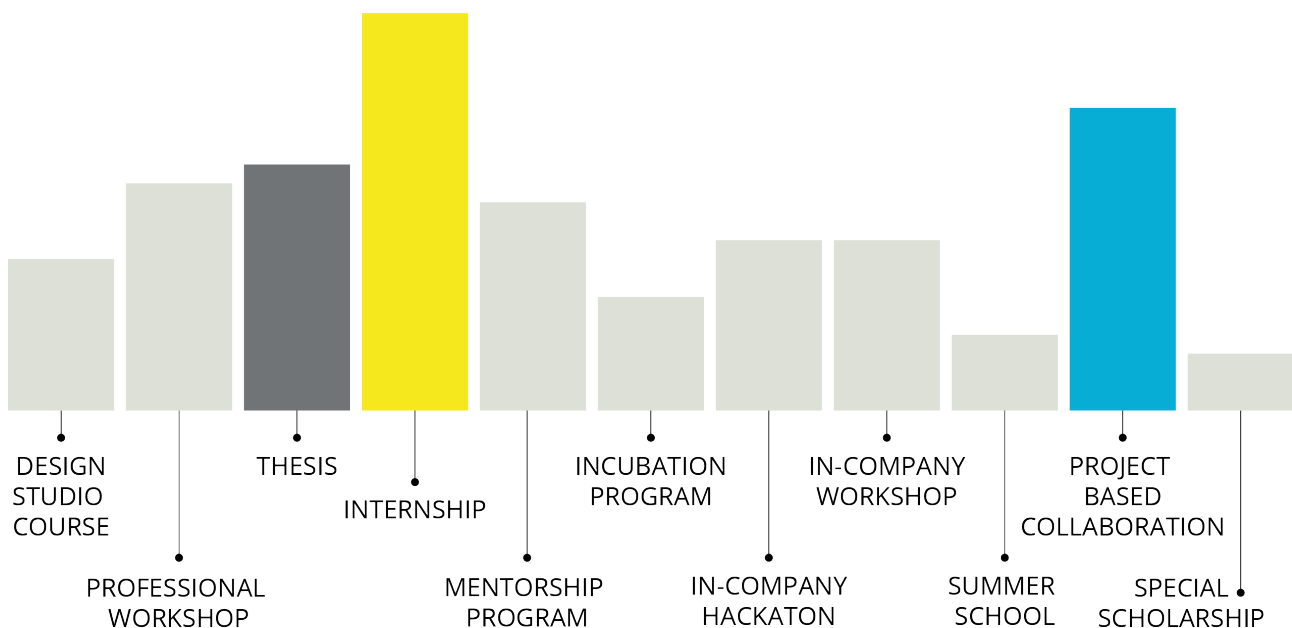
Mark Vanderbeeken, from Experientia, has been working as well with several PSSD students: he says that **“Product service system designers have to be considered as a strategic tool to give a new shape to companies”**.

Finally, Jonathan Edelman, adjunct professor in Politecnico di Milano, believes that **“the trajectory of these scholars does not make them simple employees but good leaders”**.

Activity 2

The second activity has looked into understanding the **possibilities for Advisory Board members to be more involved with PSSD in the future**. This has received 28 out of 31 positive answers, 3 blank answers and 0 negative. The most interesting channels for collaboration seems to be connected to the offer of **internship positions**, with 21 participants interested, followed by *project based collaborations* with 16 votes, and *thesis* with 13 votes. Other suggestions coming from participants have included in company training programs, presentation of professional projects, mixed student and professional lecture series, observatory for potential clients, field research, stakeholder engagement, students as a special unit inside other companies.

Collaboration possibilities: The ways to be more involved with PSSD graduates in which the participants are more interested in.



Concerning the **topics** that Advisory Board Members are interested in developing with PSSD, many options have appeared. The most frequent ones are: services for social inclusion, workshops aimed at mapping customer journeys, food innovation programs, in-store tourism, urban planning, service design and architecture, behavioural modelling, service optimisation, global innovation, policy design, cross disciplinary studies, community services, digital and retail, smart cities, UX, data driven design, brand strategy, and **“methodological approach to understand people’s behaviours”** suggested by Mark Vanderbeeken, from Experientia.

Further suggestions can be considered starting points for raising awareness about PSSD and connected disciplinary approaches in companies, for example the idea of using design thinking in companies, integrating business and technology in design practice, etc. **“The majority of the projects dies inside the company itself. We need to integrate the traditional mindset of companies with the customer centric approach of the students”** says Enrico Girotti, from Digital Accademia, H-Farm.

Some clues have been given: educating HR to understand the value of PSSD (suggested by Fabio Di Liberto and Jonathan Edelman); defining clear competences of PSSD graduates; **“Integrating later thinking methods (being aware of contemporaneity: politics, economics, environmental issues)”**, as suggested by Sergio Galasso, from Mare Culturale Urbano.

Conclusions

The meeting has been a very important starting point for future improvements in the educational program. On one hand, it has helped to shape the traits of the ideal PSS designer, to understand what the Master Class in PSSD is missing and where the academic offering should focus more, in order to improve its quality. On the other hand, it is evident that there is a very good ground for possible and future collaborations with many different types of companies, although much still needs to be done to raise awareness – in companies directly – of what PSSD means and does inside a team.

The future goal of the PSSD Direction and of the Advisory Board will be centred on understanding the best actions to answer these challenges.

Acknowledgments.

Organisers:

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