



Students see award-winning Hicks as more than a professor

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Shelby Hicks, assistant professor of interior design at Western Carolina University, has received the DesignWorks 2021 Educator Award presented by the Carolinas chapter of International Interior Design Association.

Hicks, who has worked at WCU since 2017, said that while she was honored to receive the award, the acknowledgement was a reflection of the university itself. “The presenter of the award has hired several of our students and she really gave huge kudos to our program,” Hicks said. “It wasn’t just me. It was Western’s interior design program that was being honored.”

WCU’s chapter of the IIDA is one of just five campus centers, as they’re called by the organization, in North Carolina. Hicks is the adviser. The award was especially relevant, Hicks said, because although it’s a student-nominated award,

her professional peers throughout both North and South Carolina reviewed the nominations and approved her selection.

As for her students, they see her as more than a professor. “Shelby Hicks is the best professor I have ever had or met in general. What sets her apart as a professor is how genuinely she cares about each of her students, their lives, their mental health, their education and their path in life,” said Nicole Palmer, a senior in the interior design program and president of IIDA campus center at WCU. “Shelby is always willing to take extra time to help students one-on-one in case they are not understanding the assignment or project.”

Palmer said Hicks was monumental in growing student involvement and interest in the IIDA and went beyond her teaching responsibilities to inspire students to get involved in the professional organization. “Shelby’s sole motivation in everything she does is to benefit the present and future lives of her students, many of whom she stays in contact with post-graduation and continues to assist when struggles arise in their personal life,” Palmer said.

Hicks owned and operated her own design-build firm for 25 years, as have her colleagues, which is a real boon to the program. “They’re very lucky here because all of us have worked in the profession.”

Hicks said interior design has recently been in the spotlight because the pandemic forced people to work from home, which made many rethink their workspace. “Good design makes you feel good. Good design makes your workspace easier,” she said. “Since the pandemic, more focus has been put on interior design because we’re the ones who specify the materials, the lighting, the finishes that affect our health and well-being.”



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