Design Research Journal Ranking Study

Preliminary Results

2008 July 26
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Design Research Journal Ranking Study: Preliminary Results

by

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This reports the first results of an international study on comparative rankings of journals in design and design research.

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Background

Australian universities recently received a list of journals from the Australian Research Council (ARC). This list was the proposed set of journal rankings for the new Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) initiative. This list includes journals for design and design research. Few design research journals appear on the list, and most of those few have low rankings.

The ERA journal-ranking proposal is intended to cover all appropriate journals across all fields. Journal rankings for any specific field should represent an appropriate distribution of journals for that field. Journals are described as A* journals representing the top 5% of journals in a field, A journals representing the next 15%, B journals representing the next 20%, and C journals for all the rest.
The political and financial importance of the ranking system is one aspect of the new government’s move from the former Research Quality Framework (RQF) to the new metric assessment system developed for the ERA.

This system will help to measure the research activity of any specific university. It should also demonstrate the research activity and quality of individual units, schools, or faculties. The research points allocated to design faculties or design schools in Australian universities depend on the number of points allocated to each article. That, in turn, depends on the ranking of the journal in which an article appears. Research income will follow these points, as will the credibility that researchers have when they apply for grant funding.

We identified several problems in reviewing the proposed list. Some problems affect the field of design and design research. Other problems affect all sectors.

To examine some of these problems, we will refer to the results of our study. We therefore outline our study before going further.

A Study of Journals in Design and Design Research

To identify appropriate journals for the design sector, we conducted a worldwide study by inviting leading scholars in design and design research to list leading journals in the field.

We created a web-based survey form to collect responses. The survey was an open request, giving neither titles nor prompts for order ranking. We derived order ranking for journals based on the number of times a journal was listed in unprompted response.

We sent an invitation to several high quality lists of scholars and specialists in design and design research. These lists included: 1) the membership and fellows list of the international Design Research Society (ca. 500), 2) the email bulletin of Design Studies Forum, the design and design research division of the North American College Art Association (ca. 400), 3) the world’s largest specialized design research discussion group, the Anthropology in Design research discussion forum (ca. 1,500), 4) the world’s largest general design research discussion forum, the JISCMAIL-based PhD-Design list with subscribers from many of the world’s leading universities (ca. 1,400), 5) a broad selection of journal editors and editorial board members from a wide range of journals (ca. 200), 6) members of the Australian Built Environment and Design Deans (ca. 17). While there is significant overlap between and among these lists, these enabled us to reach much of the world’s active design research community on short notice.
Scholars in several nations and regions sent the survey on to colleagues. Prof. Lin-Lin Chen, Dean of Design at the National Taiwan University of Science and Technology, was especially helpful in circulating the request in Asia. Dr. Anna-Louise Sommer, Head of Design Research at the Danish Design School, helped us to expand coverage in Scandinavia.

The survey drew 240 usable responses. These responses represent 297 respondents, a discrepancy that we account for by the fact that some respondents hold two titles, for example, professor and dean or lecturer and research fellow.

By title or position, the respondents included 63 professors, 7 deans, 5 associate deans, 43 associate professors, 7 readers, 25 research fellows and senior research fellows, 30 senior lecturers, 38 lecturers, and 42 others.

In all, the survey yielded 173 journal titles.

The greatest number of responses for any listed journal was 152 for the journal Design Studies from Elsevier. The greatest number of journals – over 130 – were mentioned five times or fewer.

Given the number and spread of respondents in terms of field, rank, and geographical distribution, this study can reasonably be said to represent the worldwide fields of design and design research. The absolute number of times any journal is mentioned is proportionate to the size of the sample. The comparative proportion of times that different journals are mentioned reflects the relative standing of journals within the field. A larger sample size would give greater number of times mentioned, but the relative proportions of times mentioned would likely be relatively similar.

The extremely long tail with few mentions mirrors the wide distribution of journals within the sector. In the last United Kingdom Research Assessment Exercise, the art and design panel received articles from over 500 different journals. If these were roughly divided between art journals and design journals, that would give a roughly equivalent total.

Because the tail is long with few mentions, we have decided that the top 5, the next 15, and the next 20 journals form a reasonable proxy for the top 5%, 15%, and the next 20%. These percentages are restrictive, given that 173 journal titles would mean a top 40% (5%, plus 15%, plus 25%) of 68 journals rather than 44 journals with a line drawn at 6 mentions or more. If we were to end the list of B journals at 7 mentions or more, there would be 37 journals in the top three levels.
Our next study will use several comparative methods to measure the validity of this first study and to draw on a larger sample with more definitive results. We hope to develop a more fine-grained analysis to answer questions we do not address here. We are completing this study in the time required to meet ARC response deadlines.

This the first study of its kind in the field, based on a large and reliable sample. The titles are well known. The reputations, impact factors, and index standing of the top journals supports our results.

Based on responses to the survey, the journals that we will recommend for the levels designated A*, A, and B follow. The numbers after each title indicate the number of unprompted responses from among the 240 completed survey forms:

**A**

*Design Studies* - 152  
*Design Issues* - 146  
*International Journal of Design* - 85  
*Design Journal* - 84  
*Journal of Design History* - 48

5

**A**

*Journal of Design Research* - 42  
*Engineering Design* - 35  
*CoDesign* - 32  
*Artifact* - 25  
*Journal of Engineering Design* - 25

10

*Research in Engineering Design* - 24  
*Design Philosophy Papers* - 23  
*Applied Ergonomics* - 21  
*Visible Language* - 20  
*CAD* - 16

15

*Design Management Journal* - 15  
*Design Research Quarterly* - 14  
*Fashion Theory* - 13  
*Human-Computer Interaction* - 13  
*Interacting with Computers* - 13
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<th>Rank</th>
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<td>Information Design Journal</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Journal of Technology and Design Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Digital Creativity</td>
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<td>Environment and Planning</td>
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<td>30</td>
<td>Journal of Architectural Education</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Winterthur Portfolio</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>AI for Engineering Design, Analysis and Manufacturing</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Art, Design and Communication in Higher Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Journal of Interior Design</td>
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<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>Studies in the Decorative Arts</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Textile</td>
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<td>37</td>
<td>Architectural Review</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Communication Arts</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Innovation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>International Journal of Art and Design Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Journal of Interior Design</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Journal of Mechanical Design</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>The Radical Designist</td>
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</table>
When we return to this project, we will give deeper consideration to methodological issues. Right now, we are dealing with the need to respond to the ERA proposal.

The study yielded a list of 173 journal titles in design and design research. We will present the full results of the study and our preliminary results after considering some of the problems in the original ERA proposal.

**Problems for Design and Design Research in the ERA Proposal**

The major problem in the ERA journal rankings for design and design research is that the list seems to have been established by scholars in other fields. While the ERA list seems to function for scholars in art or architecture, there is no comparable relationship to scholarship in design or design research.

One explanation is that no one in design research seems to have been involved in the development process. This may be a result of historical factors.

Most design programs in Australia and New Zealand seem to be located in faculties of art or architecture. If a senior professor or the associate dean for research made suggestions for the ERA proposal on behalf of an art or architecture faculty, the faculty proposal would generally represent greater knowledge of art or architecture than design. This is compounded by a second problem.

Design research is a relatively young field. It is four decades since Nobel Laureate Herbert Simon wrote the first landmark book in design science, *The Sciences of the Artificial*. At roughly the same time, Prof. Bruce Archer launched the Department of Design Research at the Royal College of Art in London. The field of design research has developed slowly since that time.

This parallels the transformation of other professional fields from guild practice to research-based practice. Medicine went through the transformation in the late 1800s. It made the decisive shift to a research base in the wake of the Carnegie Commission’s Flexner Report. After the report appeared in 1910, many North American medical schools closed or were reformed. This decisively changed the face of medicine. Engineering went through a less dramatic transformation in subsequent decades of. This has now happened in design research, with decisive growth taking place in the past ten years.

Much of the fundamental work in this field has taken place in the United Kingdom and North America. Australia and New Zealand have relatively few senior scholars in the field. Since there are few design faculties in Australia or New Zealand with design research scholars holding position at the level of dean or associate dean, it is understandable that the ARC did not get appropriate design research advice for the ERA proposal.

Other fields may face this problem in different ways.
Nevertheless, the lack of involvement from any specific field may not represent a major problem. The ERA journal proposal is open to adjustment and the ARC has invited expert commentary. With expert advice, it should be possible to create a responsible ranking system that allows for differences among fields.

The use of a single ranked list creates a different kind of problem that cannot readily be solved in the short term. This is the fact that many journals serve several adjacent fields. Such journals often have different impact and different relative value for authors and faculties in the different adjacent fields.

A small group of scholars from Swinburne University of Technology and RMIT University completed this study swiftly to permit a reasonable response to the ERA proposal from the field of design and design research.

In September, we will begin a deeper, more fine-grained study that permits us to examine specific problems and challenges in greater depth. In that study, we plan to examine some of the problems specific to the design field in any metric ranking system, along with an examination of broader problems that may affect many fields.

Several international colleagues and one or two Australian deans have suggested that metric systems or journal rankings may not be useful or valid for the fields of design and design research. We do not address this question.

The decision to establish a journal ranking system is a government policy decision. Australia is moving from the former RQF system to an ERA system based in great part on metrics. One metric involves journal rankings. Design faculties don’t set government policy. We can respond to specific issues in the current proposed journal-ranking scheme. That is our purpose here.

Problems for Journals in Design and Design Research

At this point, we will examine some specific problems that affect design and design research journals. The status of the world’s two leading design journals in the ERA proposal makes the general problem clear.

The world’s leading design journals are Design Studies from Elsevier and Design Issues from MIT Press. Both are listed in the ISI indices. Interviews suggest that these are the most highly respected journals in design research. The empirical evidence of this study demonstrates that they rank at the top among all design research journals in numbers of times mentioned. Both are mentioned nearly twice as many times as the third and fourth ranked journal, and four times as often as the fifth ranked journal in the field.
Each of these journals is two decades old. A leading scientific press published the one. A world-renowned university press published the other.

The ERA proposal ranks *Design Studies* as a B journal and it ranks *Design Issues* as a C.

The level of the leading journals in any field is significant in two dimensions. One involves visibility and impact. The other involves generality. An article in the largest general journal in a field will be visible to all scholars in the field, regardless of sub-discipline or specialization. The leading journals of an entire field therefore seek articles with the greatest possible conceptual, methodological, or empirical value. These articles are valuable to all researchers in the field. That level of general important and the level of specialized journals would generally determine the A* ranking in many fields.

The ERA ranking proposes several journals for A* rank. None of these warrants that level.

One is *Architectural Engineering and Design Management*. This journal is two years old, from the Earthscan Institute, a twenty-year old firm. Earthscan is a good firm, but it does not match 125 years of scientific and scholarly publishing at Elsevier or a history dating back to the 1920s at MIT Press.

Another proposed A* design journal is *Design*. No longer in print, it was not a scholarly journal but a design magazine once published by the UK Design Council.

The first A* journal to appear on the ERA proposal that also received a reasonably high rank in our study is the *International Journal of Technology and Design Education*. This is a respectable journal from Springer, a well-reputed scholarly and scientific publisher. Nevertheless, scholars in design and design research rank this journal at 24. In our view, this is a B journal rather than an A* journal. It ranks far below *Design Studies* and *Design Issues*.

The next A* entry is the *Journal of Interior Design* from Blackwell, ranked at 35 among scholars in design and design research. Other comparable gaps appear throughout the list.

The first journal ranked A in both our survey and the ERA proposal is the *Journal of Design Research*. It is ranked A in the ERA proposal and it has the 6th position in this survey. Another A ranking in both lists is *Co-Design*, the number 8 journal on our survey.
A comparison between two hypothetical papers for the next annual meeting of the Art Association of Australia and New Zealand will clarify the problem.

The Art Association of Australia and New Zealand is comparable to the College Art Association in North America. Just as Australia and New Zealand design historians present at AAANZ, so North Americans present their work at the CAA Design Studies Forum. Both are comparable to the specialist Design History Society in the UK.

The next AAANZ conference includes a design studies track titled “It’s Time: Constructing Australian Design History.”

Imagine that two authors develop journal articles from conference papers, submitting one to the *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art* and the other to the *Journal of Design History*.

Each of the articles will go a publication sponsored by a national association for design history.

The web site of the *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art* describes this journal as “Australasia’s principal DEST-accredited refereed art history journal.” It is co-published by the Institute of Modern Art in Brisbane in association with the Art Association of Australia and New Zealand.

The *Journal of Design History* is also published in conjunction with a scholarly association. In this case, the publisher is Oxford University Press and the society is the UK-based Design History Society. Now in its 21st volume, the journal editorial and advisory boards constitute a central group of senior scholars in the worldwide field of design history.

In the survey of scholars in design and design research, the *Journal of Design History* ranks fifth among all design research journals worldwide. In contrast, scholars in design history do not mention the *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art*. Not even Australian professors or deans mentioned *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art* for the survey, despite the fact that design historians present at the Art Association of Australia and New Zealand Association.

Here, the journals diverge further. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art* is ranked as an A journal in the proposed ERA list, clearly reflecting the interests and influence of art historians. The *Journal of Design History* is ranked as a C journal. This obviously reflects the lack of influence by scholars in design research and design history, despite the difference in world-wide influence and the reputation of Oxford University Press as the world’s oldest university press in contrast with a museum of modern art established recently.
We do not dispute the attribution of an A rank status to the *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art* as a venue for art historical studies. We dispute a ranking proposal that designates the *Journal of Design History* as a C journal in comparison.

Situations such as this make the ERA journal rank proposal a significant problem for scholars in design and design research. Design research scholars will always be disadvantaged by a journal ranking scale that favors artists or architects who publish in high ranked journals designated for their fields when the field of design research has no comparable journals.

**Comparative Problems for the Field**

Research in art and architecture frequently involves reflection and interpretation. While some kinds of design research do this, most design research journals require papers based on empirical research. They draw on a rich array or research traditions, including ethnography, ergonomics, materials science, user studies, mechanical production, or other kinds of research common to design.

Research in these modes will not find a home in art or architecture journals. The design journals that welcome empirical or social research in design are generally ranked lower than art or architecture journals.

Art or architecture programs will high points for articles by staff members publishing reflections or interpretive essays in journals designated as A* and A journals for their field. In contrast, a designer or design research scholar who does significant empirical research for an article in *Design Studies* will only get credit for a B publication.

If the leading design journals are ranked lower than journals in art or architecture, design research will, by definition, always be worse than art research or architecture research. A significant comparative study to gather data for an article in the *Art, Communication, and Design in Higher Education* — a C journal — will amount to less than an essay on how to teach painting in the *Australian Online Journal of Arts Education* — ranked as an A* journal. Such respected journals such as *The Design Journal* or *Artifact* are not listed at all.

We’re not interested in debating research in art. Every research field has a place and most have traditions different to those of other fields. A problem arises when fields such as art determine the journal rankings for a far different field such as design.

The purpose of this study is to demonstrate that design research has A* journals in a top 5% and A journals in the next 15%, and to show that these differ from journals in art or architecture.
We seek to contradict the impression that there is no top 20% in design research – on a proposed list that places our leading journal at B and moves downward from that point.

This study demonstrates what a broad range of international experts along with a general consensus of scholars in design and design research see as the leading journals in our field.

This is different to rankings established by scholars in fields that do not publish in such journals as Design Studies, International Journal of Design, Design Issues, Artifact, The Design Journal, or the other research venues that define our field.
Appendix A

The Journals by Rank Order

Design Studies - 152
Design Issues - 146
International Journal of Design - 85
Design Journal - 84
Journal of Design History - 48

5

Journal of Design Research - 42
Engineering Design - 35
CoDesign - 32
Artifact - 25
Journal of Engineering Design - 25

10

Research in Engineering Design - 24
Design Philosophy Papers - 23
Applied Ergonomics - 21
Visible Language - 20
CAD - 16

15

Design Management Journal - 15
Design Research Quarterly - 14
Fashion Theory - 13
Human-Computer Interaction - 13
Interacting with Computers - 13

20

Print Annual - 13
Eye - 12
Information Design Journal - 12
Journal of Technology and Design Education - 12
Digital Creativity - 11

25
Journal of Product Innovation Management - 11
Design Management Review - 10
Visual Communication - 9
Design and Technology Education - 8
Environment and Planning - 8

30

Journal of Architectural Education - 8
Winterthur Portfolio - 8
AI for Engineering Design, Analysis and Manufacturing - 7
Art, Design and Communication in Higher Education - 7
Journal of Interior Design - 7

35

Studies in the Decorative Arts - 7
Textile - 7
Architectural Review - 6
Communication Arts - 6
Innovation - 6

40

International Journal of Art and Design Education - 6
Journal of Interior Design - 6
Journal of Mechanical Design - 6
The Radical Designist - 6
Grey Room - 5

45

Home Cultures - 5
IDEA - 5
Journal of Design Principles and Practice - 5
Journal of Research Practice - 5

50

Journal of Visual Culture - 5
Metropolis - 5
October - 5
Baseline - 4
Harvard Business Review (HBR) - 4

55
Harvard Design Magazine - 4
Journal of Design Communication - 4
Journal of Material Culture - 4
Journal of Modern Craft - 4
Point - Art and Design Research Journal - 4

60

Working Papers in Art & Design - 4
AGDA Journal (Visual: Design: Scholarship) - 3
AIGA Journal of Design - 3
Computers and Human Behaviour - 3
Cybernetics and Human Knowing - 3

65

Design Week - 3
Domus - 3
Émigré - 3
Ergonomics in Design - 3
Graphis - 3

70

How - 3
International Journal of Design Computing - 3
Journal of Sustainable Design - 3
Technology and Culture - 3
Advanced Engineering Informatics - 2

75

Architecture Design Research - 2
Assemblage - 2
Computer Arts - 2
Design News - 2
Design Observer - 2

80

Design Politics - 2
Empirical Studies of the Arts - 2
Engineering Education - 2
Interactions - 2
Journal of Decorative Arts - 2

85
Journal of Visual Studies - 2
JSAH - 2
Landscape - 2
Modernism - 2
NextD - 2

90

Otto - 2
Places - 2
Scandinavian Journal of Design History - 2
The Journal of Cloth and Culture - 2
TOPOS - 2

95

AA Files - 1
ACM Interactions - 1
AI in Engineering Knowledge-based Systems - 1
AI Magazine - 1
AIT - 1

100

Antiques, Art & Auction - 1
Architectural digest - 1
Architectural Record - 1
Architecture Australia - 1
artichoke - 1

105

Arts Culture - 1
CMYK - 1
Costume - 1
Creativity - 1
Daidalos - 1

110

Design Poetics - 1
Dot Dot Dot - 1
El Croquis - 1
Environmental & Architectural Phenomenology Newsletter - 1
Fashion Projects - 1

115
Fibre Culture - 1  
Hotel Design Magazine - - 1  
Human Technology - 1  
IEEE transaction of Professional Communication - 1  
indesign - 1

120

International Business and Technical Communication - 1  
International Journal of HCI - - 1  
International Journal of Advertising - 1  
Issues in Architecture Art and Design - 1  
JOLA - 1

125

Journal of Aesthetic Education - 1  
Journal of Architectural History - 1  
Journal of Artists Books - 1  
Journal of Computers in Science and Engineering - 1  
Journal of Concurrent Engineering: Research and Applications - 1

130

Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts - 1  
Journal of Diversity in Organisations, Communities and Nations - 1  
Journal of Environmental, Cultural, Economic and Social Sustainability - 1  
Journal of Fashion Design, Technology and Education - 1  
Journal of Interaction Design - 1

135

Journal of Plurality in Design - 1  
Journal of Southeast Asian Architecture - 1  
Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians - 1  
Journal of Urban Design - 1  
Journal of Visual Communication - - 1

140

Journal of Writing Research - 1  
JSSD - 1  
Landscape Architecture Australia - 1  
Leonardo - 1  
LOTUS - 1

145

Man and Cybernetics - 1
md - 1
Mesh - 1
Metaphor and Symbol - 1
METU Journal of the Faculty of Architecture - 1

150

New Design - 1
Planning Perspectives - 1
Polooxygen - 1
Praxis - 1
RealTime - 1

155

Reflections - 1
Representations - 1
Research Issues in Art, Design, and Media - 1
Scan Journal of Media - 1
Service Design Journal - 1

160

Sleeper - 1
Technical Communication Quarterly - 1
The Australian Journal of Media and Culture - 1
The International Journal of the Arts in Society - 1

165

The National Grid - 1
The World of Interiors - 1
Theoretical Issues in Ergonomics Science - 1
Traditional Dwellings and Settlements Review - 1
Typography Papers - 1

170

U & IC Form - 1
Urban Design International - 1
Written Communication - 1

Total number of journals

N = 173
Appendix B

Journals Clustered by Numbers of Responses

150+
Design Studies - 152

140+
Design Issues - 146

80+
International Journal of Design - 85
Design Journal - 84

40+
Journal of Design History - 48
Journal of Design Research - 42

30+
Engineering Design - 35
CoDesign - 32

20+
Artifact - 25
Journal of Engineering Design - 25
Research in Engineering Design - 24
Design Philosophy Papers - 23
Applied Ergonomics - 21
Visible Language - 20
10+

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<td>Design Management Journal</td>
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Journal of Design Principles and Practice - 5
Journal of Research Practice - 5
Journal of Visual Culture - 5
Metropolis - 5
October - 5
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Otto - 2
Places - 2
Scandinavian Journal of Design History - 2
The Journal of Cloth and Culture - 2
TOPOS - 2

ACM Interactions - 1
AI in Engineering Knowledge-based Systems - 1
AI Magazine - 1
AIT - 1
Antiques, Art & Auction - 1
Architectural digest - 1
Architectural Record - 1
Architecture Australia - 1
artichoke - 1
Arts Culture - 1
CMYK - 1
Costume - 1
Creativity - 1
Daidalos - 1
Design Poetics - 1
Dot Dot Dot - 1
El Croquis - 1
Environmental & Architectural Phenomenology Newsletter - 1
Fashion Projects - 1
Fibre Culture - 1
Hotel Design Magazine - - 1
Human Technology - 1
IEEE transaction of Professional Communication - 1
indesign - 1
International Business and Technical Communication - 1
International Journal of HCI - - 1
International Journal of Advertising - 1
Issues in Architecture Art and Design - 1
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Technical Communication Quarterly - 1
The Australian Journal of Media and Culture - 1
The International Journal of the Arts in Society - 1
The National Grid - 1
The World of Interiors - 1
Theoretical Issues in Ergonomics Science - 1
Traditional Dwellings and Settlements Review - 1
Typography Papers - 1
U & IC Form - 1
Urban Design International - 1
Written Communication - 1

Total number of journals

N = 173
Appendix C

Usable Responses

N = 240

Respondent Profile by Title or Position

Professor – 63  
Dean - 7  
Associate Dean - 5   
Associate Professor - 43  
Assistant Professor - 37  
Reader - 7  
Research Fellow (Senior) - 25  
Senior Lecturer - 30  
Lecturer - 38  
Other - 42

N = 297