

## Working Group: Fostering Inclusivity in Architectural Education

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**Working Group investigates exclusionary practices in architectural pedagogy as a means to build more equitable and inclusive architecture programs and therefore, a more diverse profession. At the Fall 2019 ACSA Conference, Less Talk | More Action, the authors led a small roundtable discussion where participants identified barriers to studying architecture and discussed ways that schools were working to overcome these barriers. After this discussion, the authors conducted further research to deepen their understanding of several of the barriers discussed. The following paper outlines the session discussion and subsequent research. The authors use data from national organizations such as ACSA, AIA, and NAAB to understand the current demographic makeup of institutions and architecture offices, and survey diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) statements on architecture program websites, in light of new NAAB criteria that requires programs to communicate their DEI statements. Because many barriers affect whether students would choose to study architecture in the first place, the authors identify programs working at the K-12 level to expose underrepresented minority students to architecture, and map programs to understand their distribution in the United States. The authors discuss examples of educators working to reinvent architecture pedagogy to produce more inclusive environments, and make recommendations on what can be done to foster more inclusive architectural pedagogy and urge national organizations to hold programs accountable beyond the DEI statement.**

### INTRODUCTION

While social movements such as Black Lives Matter, Me Too, and He for She have sparked conversations about inequality and called for large-scale social change, architecture schools have struggled to respond. Groups such as NOMA, the Architecture Lobby, Missing 32% project, Madame Architect, Architexx, and 400 Forward are doing important work to make the profession more equitable, but academic institutions largely continue to promote a homogenous architectural canon that is predominantly white, male, wealthy, and western. Most schools reproduce the outdated educational model that demands students give themselves over entirely to unreasonable workloads, does not acknowledge healthy boundaries, and necessitates an inhumane number of all-nighters. This exclusionary model limits access to non-traditional college

students such as underprepared students, single parents, caregivers, and those who must work while attending school. While this model may once have been possible for the majority of university attendees, today it remains possible only for privileged students who can afford to attend school, live on campus and are not expected to work while doing so. Not only does this pedagogical model limit diversity within the profession; it also teaches students unhealthy work habits that persist beyond architecture school. In this paper, we examine the structure of architectural education to understand how it affects underrepresented groups and stifles the diversity of architectural programs and the profession at large. In our session, we held a small roundtable that discussed barriers to access, programs our respective schools had developed to address these barriers, and strategies and tactics to cultivate a more inclusive environment.

### SESSION DISCUSSION

We started the session off with a short icebreaker, asking participants to share the qualities of the best professor that they had ever had. Responses reflected what most of us aim to be on our best days; challenging, respectful, open-minded, generous, supportive, understanding, acting as design coaches while holding students accountable. After this exercise, the conversation shifted to identifying barriers. Perhaps stemming from the small size of the group at our session, or more likely, the willingness of participants to be vulnerable, individuals shared stories about barriers that they had either directly experienced or witnessed. We worked to categorize barriers according to when a student is most likely to encounter them.

In the session discussion we chose to focus on barriers surrounding the education of an architect, since, as educators, this is the area in which we have the most experience and agency to affect change. The majority of barriers we identified can be considered early obstacles, such as a lack of exposure to the profession, high educational preparedness expectations for entry into architecture programs, and the high cost of architectural education. These barriers affect who considers architecture as a potential profession and ultimately who applies to architecture programs. Especially in rural areas, these factors are compounded by a lack of local architecture programs and the resultant lack of local professionals to serve as mentors. Without programs or mentors,

summer programs for high school students are more difficult to come by. Students in urban areas coming from working-class backgrounds or minority groups experience a similar lack of visibility of the profession. Even though programs may exist in their cities, this lack of exposure to architecture as a viable career option prevents these potential students from applying.

A variety of other obstacles exist for educationally underprepared students coming from underperforming school districts. These obstacles are rendered explicit through calculus and physics requirements, portfolio requirements, as well as GPA and standardized test score requirements. Financial burdens, such as the cost of a four-year education in architecture coupled with the requirement to complete a master's degree in architecture, are significant obstacles for many students coming from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and can discourage would-be first-generation college students from applying to architecture programs. During school, exorbitant costs of technology and materials place further financial burdens on students. If a student is able to overcome the aforementioned obstacles and enroll in a program, they will still need to contend with the studio's long hours and full-time schedule—which are often in direct conflict with work, parental, familial, other caregiver obligations. Considering that women traditionally fulfill caregiver roles in their families, women are more significantly impacted by the time-demands of studio. Long studio hours are also a barrier for students who struggle to keep their mental health needs in balance. Physical aspects of the program can be a less-commonly-recognized barrier and make architectural education difficult for students with mobility limitations. What can we do to ease these burdens for students once they arrive? What can we do to limit the barriers to students before arrival?

Early exposure in middle school, high school outreach programs, and alternative models of learning such as project-based learning rooted in architecture, linked-learning, and integrative learning can all help to combat the lack of exposure to architecture as a possible career option. Educating high school counselors on the employability of architecture graduates can also help encourage students to consider architecture as a viable career choice and demystify the profession. One participant shared a story about the residential program for first-generation college students that her institution started. The program helps first-generation students develop a community at the university which serves as a kind of social scaffolding. Programs like these, when done well, can provide students a sense of belonging and support. By meeting students where they are, institutions can become allies instead of adversaries as they help students grow to meet their potential. It will take a dedicated effort to overturn years of exclusionary thinking to move academia and the profession into the 21st century.

To broaden our understanding of issues raised during the session discussion, we researched the current climate around diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) as it applies to the discipline of architecture; K-12 architecture programs that expose underrepresented minority students to architecture; and examples of architecture educators working to reinvent architecture pedagogy to produce more inclusive environments.

### INSTITUTIONAL EFFORTS TOWARD DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION

DEI in architecture is being worked on from a number of angles, by a number of organizations, and at a number of scales. Working at the macro scale, organizations such as ACSA, AIA, and NAAB have led efforts to identify the demographic makeup of institutions and architecture offices through data-backed research. In its efforts toward diversity, the ACSA Education Committee has authored a number of studies that address DEI, ranging from the Cards for Equity series<sup>1</sup> launched in 2017 to the most recent, a comprehensive study of socioeconomic inequity as a major barrier for students pursuing an education in Architecture.<sup>2</sup> The ACSA Board of Directors has taken steps to promote diversity in its member schools through a series of actions that leverage NAAB and AIA statistical data to measure progress toward diversity, as outlined on its website.<sup>3</sup> The AIA has convened committees to produce statements, studies, and initiatives that advance the profession's commitment to DEI.<sup>4</sup> The Diversity Advancement Scholarship, a yearly, renewable scholarship from the Architects Foundation, offers students up to a \$20,000 total award.<sup>5</sup> In their 2018 Annual Report on Architecture Education, the National Architectural Accrediting Board (NAAB) released statistics of faculty, students, and graduates of accredited institutions, showing that academic

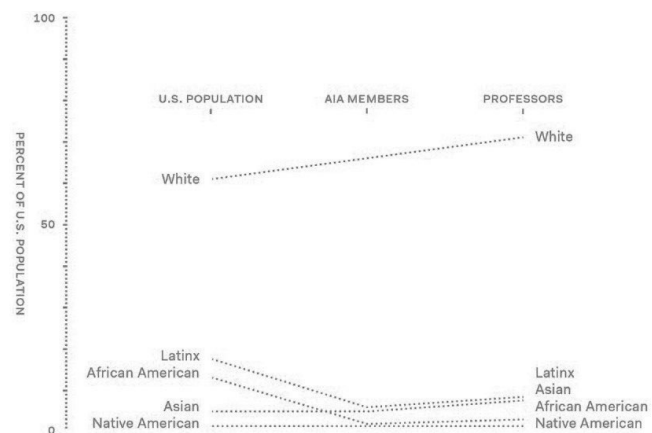


Figure 1: Racial disparities in AIA members and Architecture Professors. Alice Liao, "Increasing Diversity in Architecture: Barriers to Entry," *Architect Magazine*, May 13, 2019, [http://www.architect-magazine.com/practice/increasing-diversity-in-architecture-barriers-to-entry\\_o](http://www.architect-magazine.com/practice/increasing-diversity-in-architecture-barriers-to-entry_o)

institutions and their graduates still lack the diversity necessary to address the AIA's commitment to "broadening equity, diversity, and inclusion to create a stronger profession."<sup>6</sup> NAAB is making moves to hold schools accountable for DEI within the accreditation process: in the early "draft zero" NAAB 2020 Conditions for Accreditation, section 5.5, "Social Equity," specifically outlines that as a condition for accreditation, "[t]he program must have a policy on diversity and inclusion that is communicated to current and prospective faculty, students, and staff and is reflected in the distribution of the program's human, physical and financial resources."<sup>7</sup>

We looked at the diversity, equity and inclusion statements of a small but representative cross-section of schools from each NAAB-defined region in the United States: large and small programs, public and private institutions, and schools that specialize in both research and teaching. Out of fourteen schools, five had statements specific to architecture, while the rest had university-wide DEI statements. Two of these schools were very small and had only art and architecture programs, so in essence, about half of the schools had school-specific statements. Because architectural pedagogy differs in many ways from other academic programs, it raises DEI issues that are unique to architecture. We believe that this lack of school-specific DEI statements speaks to a greater need for architecture schools to specifically take on the lack of equity at the institutional level.

The following excerpts from architecture school DEI statements demonstrate the variety of ways that institutions approach the statement:

Our mission has long been socially minded, with many of our faculty and alumni producing globally recognized solutions in affordable housing to new sustainable infrastructure. Yet, despite our progressive legacy, we do not yet adequately represent the rich world our profession is meant to serve – neither in our current faculty and student demographics, nor in the breadth of our curriculum. This is a universal conundrum facing every school of architecture in the United States today. (University of Southern California School of Architecture)<sup>8</sup>

The University of Virginia has been shaped by a fundamental contradiction between the democratic ideals on which it was founded and the reality that, for well over a century, the educational experience it offered was available only to a restricted and decidedly exclusive population of economically privileged, socially elite, white men. At the same time, our institution was built upon and its daily operation was made possible by the labor of many who were excluded from its classrooms and its privileges, including enslaved laborers, women, and men of lower socio-economic standing... (University of Virginia School of Architecture)<sup>9</sup>

The GSD believes in equipping students with the skills to design spaces for all people to navigate. To accomplish this, we prioritize the innovation and reflection that comes from recognizing diverse perspectives and experiences, and creating space for them in our community. Our diversity, inclusion, and belonging focus areas include recruitment and retention, community engagement, representation, and assessment." (Harvard University Graduate School of Design)<sup>10</sup>

While medicine, law, and other professions have made considerable progress, race and gender equity remains a major concern in architecture and planning, and among the organizations that oversee education and practice. Inside universities, the demographics are more promising, but still lag behind national averages. Too often, this discussion begins and ends with the numbers. While the percentages of underrepresented minorities, women, and other groups are key measures of progress, numbers do not necessarily reflect the commitment a school of architecture and planning has to diversity and social justice. (University at Buffalo School of Architecture and Planning)<sup>11</sup>

AAP is committed to an inclusive and diverse student body and an open learning environment that is free from bigotry and bias. We will not tolerate prejudice in any form or discrimination on any basis. We embrace creative practices that challenge preconceptions and prejudice; encourage boundless curiosity about the many forms of built culture; and defend the prerogative of the arts to ask difficult and provocative questions. (Cornell University College of Architecture, Art, and Planning)<sup>12</sup>

## K-12 ARCHITECTURE PROGRAMS

In order to truly increase diversity in architecture, DEI issues must be considered before, during, and after architecture school. We understand that, in order for prospective students to choose to study architecture in the first place, they need to be aware of architecture as a possible profession. As Alice Liao writes in *Architect Magazine*, "Primary school students with limited or no access to architects—or even to the concept of architecture—will, as expected, take longer to identify design as a potential career path."<sup>13</sup> Students from underrepresented minority groups may not know someone in their family or community who is an architect, leading to cyclical, generational exclusion. To address this issue, many schools and organizations have created K-12 architecture programs that explicitly aim to expose young people from underrepresented minority groups to architecture. These preparatory programs, while important, are not equally distributed across the United States-- and many of them were created relatively recently. In order to better understand where gaps remain, we mapped K-12 architecture programs around the country, assuming that students living outside of these areas would have a lower

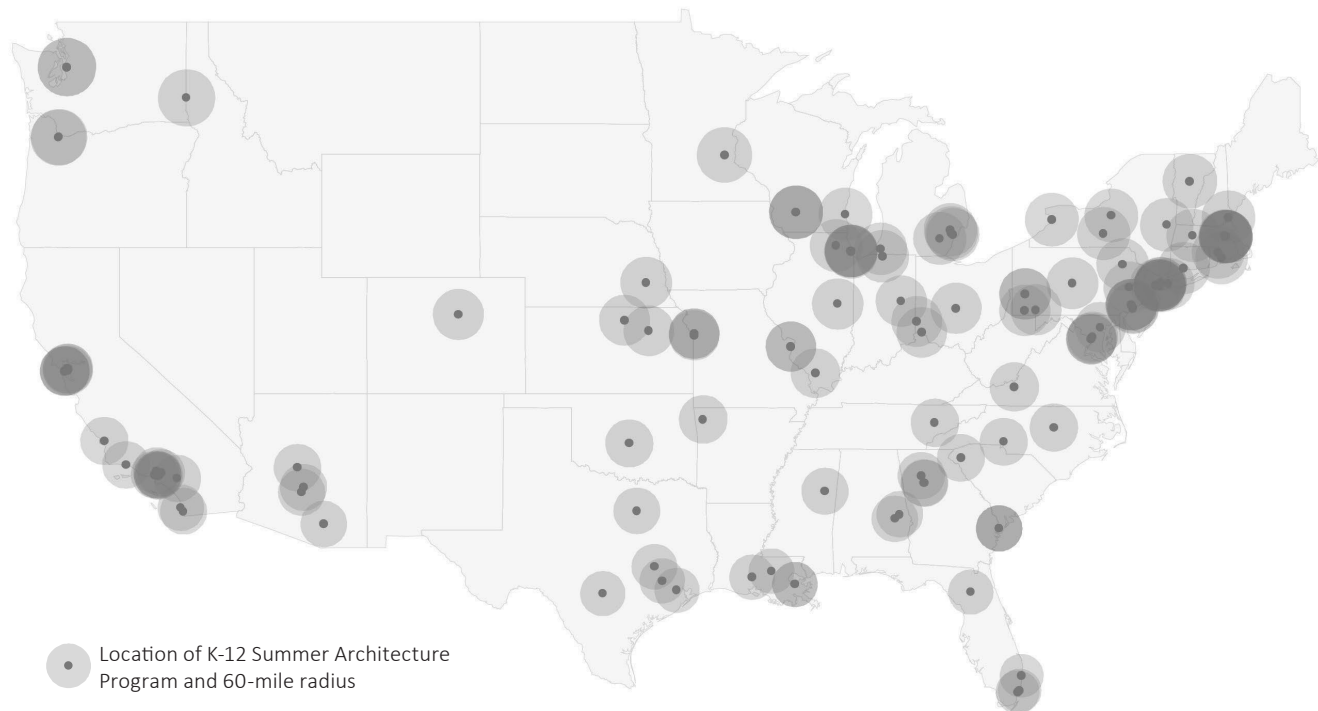


Figure 2: 2019 K-12 Summer Architecture Programs in the United States. Data source: Study Architecture (<https://www.studyarchitecture.com/blog/architecture-news/2019-architecture-summer-programs/>)

chance of being exposed to architecture as a possible career path. K-12 architecture programs are concentrated on the east and west coasts, while several states in the middle of the country offer no K-12 programs at all.

Enrollment in most of these K-12 programs costs money (the cost varies widely among programs). Even when students live near a K-12 architecture program, they may not be able to pay for the cost of participation. Some programs are explicitly working to make architectural education freely available to underrepresented minority students. NOMA's Project Pipeline<sup>14</sup> and the Hip Hop Architecture Camp<sup>15</sup> offer free participation in summer and after-school programs to students in a range of age groups, from elementary school through high school. The University of Michigan's Taubman College's<sup>16</sup> and Princeton University School of Architecture's<sup>17</sup> ArcPrep programs partner directly with public high schools to embed architectural education within high school curriculum.

### PEDAGOGICAL TRANSFORMATION

If architecture school is to become more accessible and compelling for a more diverse range of students, architectural pedagogy itself must be transformed. Several ongoing projects investigate this question. Beatriz Colmina's *Radical Pedagogies*, a collaborative effort to unearth and examine the experiments in architectural pedagogy of the second half of the 20th Century, outlines ways that faculty and students have mobilized pedagogy to challenge educational institutions and the discipline's

"relation to social, political and economic processes." Colmina terms the project "a provocation and a call to arms," diagnosing the state of architecture education as follows:

Architectural pedagogy has become stale. Schools spin old wheels as if something is happening but so little is going on. Students wait for a sense of activist engagement with a rapidly evolving world but graduate before it happens. The fact that they wait for instruction is already the problem. Teachers likewise worry too much about their place in the institutional hierarchies. Curricular structures have hardly changed in recent decades, despite the major transformations that have taken place with the growth of globalisation, new technologies, and information culture. As schools appear to increasingly favour professionalisation, they seem to drown in self-imposed bureaucratic oversight, suffocating any possibility for the emergence of experimental practices and failures. There are a few attempts to wake things up here and there but it's all so timid in the end. There is no real innovation.

The "radical pedagogies" of the late 20th Century, Colmina writes, "affected the institutions that swallowed them up and... lie within the discipline, waiting to be reawakened by another generation, like a dormant virus or a monster in a horror film."<sup>18</sup> The *Radical Pedagogies* case studies, available as an online archive, offer valuable references for those seeking to transform the ways we study architecture today.<sup>19</sup>



Two recent pedagogical experiments have sought to create entirely new spaces for architectural pedagogy, outside of the bounds of the accredited institution. The Free School of Architecture (FSA) in Los Angeles, founded in 2016 by Peter Zellner and now run by Karina Andreeva, Lili Carr, Elisha Cohen and Tessa Forde, began as a “100% tuition-free, participant-led, six week education and cultural program committed to the free exploration and exchange of ideas in and around architecture.” The FSA uses “peer-to-peer learning and participant directed programming” to destabilize traditional hierarchical structures and support collective teaching and learning.<sup>20</sup> FSA’s stated values, “Non-hierarchy,” “Interdisciplinarity and inclusivity,” and “Freeness (free from constraints of academy and practice, tuition-free, free to be silent or to question)”<sup>21</sup> fundamentally reject the constraints of educational institutions and raise important questions for those same institutions. Can the constraints of the academy be undone? Is reform possible?

Making Futures School, a “non-disciplinary learning environment” focused on spatial practices and based in Berlin, “invites us to explore forms of productive cooperation, exchange, solidarity and living,” in order to challenge images of the future defined by capitalist extraction and the “individualist, solution-oriented ‘architect-hero.’”<sup>22</sup> Like the Free School of Architecture, Making Futures School creates an entirely new context in which to study and learn about spatial practices, apart from the academy. Elise Hunchuck writes in her article, “Making Space: on the need for intersectional feminism in architecture schools” in the Making Futures School Newspaper, “To consider the long, deeply entrenched legacy of discrimination, erasure and exclusion enacted by our institutions is to question the legitimacy of our institutions. And although it might be difficult to provide a clear, coherent framework as a way to move forward, it is not impossible.”<sup>23</sup> For both FSA and Making Futures School, dismantling hierarchies, fostering collective processes, and challenging the boundaries of architectural practice are critical to transforming the way we think, learn, and practice architecture in the contemporary world.

Many faculty, students, and administrators are working to transform pedagogy within (and outside of) their own institutions. For the other session the authors led at the Less Talk | More Action Conference, “MORE REAL: Collecting Studio Culture Confessions and Successes,” we surveyed studio instructors about their experience of studio culture. We hope MORE REAL, as it grows, will help us learn more about the many ways faculty, students, and administrators are working to transform architectural pedagogy themselves.

## CONCLUSION

In order to truly increase diversity in architecture, DEI issues must be considered before, during, and after architecture school. While this paper focuses on architecture school itself, other organizations are working to support students from underrepresented minority groups in attaining licensure and advancing

their careers after graduation. Notably, Tiffany Brown’s 400 FORWARD project, named for “the 400th living African American woman recently becoming a licensed architect in 2017 (out of over 113,000 total licensed in the US),” “introduces young girls to architecture, provides scholarships and wrap around services to college students, and pays for study material and licensing exams for African American women in architecture.”<sup>24</sup> Brown’s holistic approach is a powerful model that acknowledges the need for sustained support and long-term relationships.

As the outdated demands of architecture school are placed in contrast with contemporary social movements, it becomes clear that the role of institutions must shift from building barriers which limit access to students, to constructing scaffolding that accommodates a variety of student abilities and experiences by meeting them where they are and facilitating their education. Many studies have stressed the importance of exposing young people to architecture as a potential career opportunity. Given our findings about the lack of K-12 programs in the middle of the country, it may be worth looking into other mobile methods of recruiting potential architecture students, such as a tour of architecture workshops and speakers that engage with students, or working to empower local teachers with curricula that would introduce students to architecture. These are a few examples of possible ways to expose students in these areas to architecture.

Considering that about half the schools we surveyed had architecture-specific DEI statements, and even fewer had specific actionable plans in place, it makes sense that NAAB would prioritize work towards increased diversity as a factor in accreditation. We hope that NAAB will continue to encourage more inclusive pedagogies. While ACSA has been doing good work on the DEI front, we feel that ACSA can play a larger role in bringing awareness of architecture to prospective students through the expansion of their “Study Architecture” website.<sup>25</sup> The AIA and NCARB could adopt a similar model to “Study Architecture” to provide a more accessible database of mentoring and other opportunities.

We found that the small scale of conversations at our ACSA roundtable helped participants engage in conversations about their own path in architecture. Attendees, most of whom are now faculty, shared stories about lack of access and exposure. Based on this finding, we need to make space to celebrate the variety of backgrounds that architects come from as a means to inspire the next generation. This can begin by having candid conversations about how each of us landed where we did, and how we overcame the barriers we encountered along the way. To have these conversations would be a radical reversal of the well-worn architect-as-solo-genius trope, making space to focus on the collaborative spirit and work ethic of the architect. This much-needed update to the concept of what architects do in the collective consciousness could help inspire students who might not otherwise consider architecture as a potential career.

While we can study institutional reports and statistics, analyze data, and read literature, this will never capture the myriad ways that people are working, as individuals and collectives, to make the discipline of architecture a more equitable and human space. We see the student groups, gathering before a public lecture to write critical questions. We see the faculty taking extra time to support their students. We see the administrators working to remove unnecessary curriculum requirements. We see the researchers connecting with people beyond their institutions. We see the architects building ethical practices. This movement will transform our institutions if it is sustained. Those who have historically been excluded from the profession-- whether along the lines of race, ethnicity, gender, or sexuality-- are leading this effort. The most important thing academic institutions can do to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion in architecture is listen to them and support their work.

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