

2023

Fellowships in Architectural Education

ASSOCIATION OF COLLEGIATE
SCHOOLS OF ARCHITECTURE



Fellowships in Architectural Education

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1.0 PREAMBLE

The intention of this paper is to highlight the rapidly expanding framework of new faculty development, with a specific focus on fellowships, at schools of architecture and design. Since the recent surge of racial reckoning in 2020, our discipline has seen an influx of new faculty fellowships focused on research and representation related to issues of social and environmental justice, racial equity, and community engagement. By engaging current and former fellows, full-time faculty, and administrators, this paper articulates the fine line between fellowships as a point of access to teaching opportunity, and the inherent precarity of short-term faculty positions, especially for topics related to social and environmental justice. By asking questions about institutional constraints, the impact on classrooms and curricula, and the unspoken service advising students interested in current topics, this paper provides insight to the experience of fellows across architectural education.

1.1 Audience

The intended audience of this paper includes institution administrators, deans, director, chairs, and department heads, as well as early career fellows and matriculating graduate students looking to pursue careers in architectural education. Administrators at various levels of the institution set the strategic vision for fellowships and other limited term positions. This vision becomes even more critical when the fellowships created have a particular focus on social equity, activism, or climate justice. This paper offers some recommendations for administrators hoping to provide a fellowship as a pathway into architectural education.

Moreover, this paper offers an intimate view of the fellowship experience highlighting the successes and failures of programs as they currently exist at various institutions. As such, the paper equips prospective fellows with points of inquiry and professional insight to help frame their in teaching, research, curation, and service.

1.2 Committee Charge

The Leadership Committee leads ACSA's efforts to support the strategic development of architecture programs. The committee identifies and disseminates best practice models of program leadership and administration and oversees ACSA's efforts to promote awareness of architecture education.

In 2022-2023 the Leadership Committee was charged with surveying and evaluating new faculty positions—fellowships, visiting positions, etc., aimed toward diversifying faculty and expanding teaching, research, and scholarship on issues of social and environmental justice, racial equity, and community engagement. Specifically, the committee is asked to provide a survey of existing and new faculty positions that fall within these parameters and evaluate their efficacy in advancing young contingent faculty into tenure-track or other forms of permanent teaching positions.

2.0 CONFERENCE SESSIONS

For purposes of limiting the scope of the study, the committee agreed on a definition of “fellowships” as follows: a short-term, non-tenure track teaching/research positions in architecture, planning, and the built environment schools and programs, with a specific agenda. During the 2022-23 academic year, the committee curated two ACSA conference sessions for the purpose of engaging a wider audience around questions of bringing more diverse people and positions into stable and remunerative teaching positions. These sessions generated much of our insights about the role of administrators in attracting, developing, and retaining early career academics in architecture.

2.1 ACSA Administrators Conference

On November 4, 2022, the Leadership Committee hosted the panel “Building the Faculty Our Discipline Deserves” at the ACSA Administrators Conference, held at Northeastern University in Boston, MA. The panel, composed of: Thaïsa Way (Dumbarton Oaks, Deans’ Equity and Inclusion Initiative), Michael Zaretsky (University of Oregon), Igor Marjanović (Rice University), Iñaki Alday (Tulane University), Robert González (University of New Mexico), was moderated by Edson Cabalfin (Tulane University) and focused on sharing the best practices of a diverse type of fellowship programs, ranging in length, funding structure, and time in existence. The panel highlighted the various leadership experience and challenges in creating or maintaining teaching fellowships in architecture schools. Administrators shared their school’s story by framing their fellowship as years-long process efforts in contrast to the most recent fellowships that emerged after the summer of 2020. Administrators pointed to hiring challenges, channeling existing resources, fitting within institutional faculty nomenclature, perception of fellows within their faculty body, and lastly, began to articulate the limits of their accomplishment. Overall, they painted a picture full of juggling local contingencies, making the idea of a fellowship not easily interchangeable. The panel also recognized the role of the Dean’s Equity and Inclusion Initiative led by Dumbarton Oaks in aiding to gather deans and directors to support fellowships and share their experiences to improve them. It was clear that not all fellowships are created equal and that they can both open space for younger, non-traditional career faculty paths, while they can also help to reproduce the uneven field of privilege by allowing few prospects to advance their careers given the limited resources a fellowship can offer.

2.2 ACSA Annual Meeting

During the 111th ACSA Annual Meeting, the committee hosted the session entitled “Progress Survey on Fellowships in Architectural Education” on March 30, 2023, in St. Louis, MO. The panel was co-facilitated by Leadership Committee members Marcelo López-Dinardi (Texas A&M University), Amelyn Ng (RISD), and Noah Resnick (U. Detroit–Mercy), and moderated by Edson Cabalfin (Tulane University). The fellowship panel focused on reporting on the progress the leadership committee had made in their outreach attempts to connect with former fellows and learn from their experiences. This panel included a presentation from the committee’s research during 2022-2023, highlighting the findings and the challenges of collecting information and data about the fellowship programs. Fellows and administrators cited three evident themes and challenges. The first was to improve the overall practical and logistical support for those applying to and becoming fellows and to improve the social and emotional support during the process. This was even more critical to those fellows whose role was to fulfill a DEI initiative. The second theme identified was to create or improve a mentorship practice as part of the fellowship to support the faculty’s learning of academic protocols, expectations, and career paths to tenure-track or others, among others. Finally, participant feedback suggested improving the culture of fellowships within the school, beyond the scope of the fellow’s work to enhance their inclusion as members of the faculty body. The panel also included process metrics for how the fellowship aided or not the fellows in advancing their career paths.

3.0 RESEARCH INSIGHTS

We developed an eight-question survey that asked former fellows questions about their goals and experiences, their access to support structures, and aspects of their fellowship that could be improved. More broadly, we asked them to reflect on their own impact at their institutions, as well as the fellowship's impact on their own professional trajectory. We also asked their opinion on more structural questions: on whether they thought fellowship programs contributed to stability or precarity of teaching positions in architecture schools, and whether they are creating a different kind of privilege or equality within the discipline. From our outreach to 55 fellows over 3 months, we received 12 responses. While these results are by no means generalizable to all fellows or programs, they offer valuable qualitative reflections at the granular level that go beyond general job descriptions or publicized exhibition outcomes.

Similarly, we developed a seven-question survey for administrators with architecture fellowships at their respective schools. Administrators were asked a parallel set of questions with a particular focus on how the fellowships fit within the structure and the culture of the department, school, and university. Read together, the survey results help narrate the typically opaque material conditions of, impact on, and significance of a fellowship to early career scholars, and offer some clues on how to better serve fellows during their term and beyond.

3.1 Fellowship as a pathway into academia

All fellowship responses concurred that the fellowship had significantly impacted their professional trajectory — ranging from “It feels consequential” to “entirely changed my professional life” or “entirely responsible for my career switch into teaching.” Respondents described it as a great “jump start” in establishing their own body of work, or as a way to “soften the landing” of a career switch to teaching given the “labor and uncertainty involved” in academia. Half of all fellowship respondents remarked that the fellowship has helped position them for a tenure-track position or subsequent full-time employment at other institutions. Of these, one-fourth of respondents specifically mentioned that their fellowship allowed them to build a portfolio / teaching record that set them up for success in the job market. Some respondents saw the fellowship as “testing the waters”; a “bigger stepping stone” than adjunct positions; that it gave “a good enough idea” of an academic career for one to decide to stay. Other affirmative words used to describe the fellowship experience include rewarding, stimulating, enabling, formative, academic freedom, ample resources, and a positive impact.

When questions about stability, precarity, privilege and equality were asked, however, the survey also made plain the less flattering aspects of a fellowship: pressure, stressful, highly competitive, not an ideal situation, destabilizing, far from family and support networks, very underpaid, probably overall exploitative (when describing low-paid one-year fellowships), challenging and undermin[ing] (when describing repeat fellowships), onerous requirements for entry, barrier to entry, insularity, nothing is guaranteed afterward.

3.2 Time

Nearly half of the fellowship respondents explicitly stated they pursued the fellowship to start or explore a teaching career, and more than half of the respondents sought the teaching opportunity, either to gain experience or “to teach courses more directly aligned with [their] research.” Three-fourth of the respondents regarded the fellowship as a way to support research or project-based work (in the form of dedicated time, space, or funding) outside of, or in supplement to, professional practice. Of these, more than half of the respondents valued

time: “to have time to research”; “dedicated time and funding to develop a research focus”; “time and space and resources to pursue my own practice.”

This notion that fellowships provide more time for research is accurate in some fellow experiences and not the case in others. One respondent, who “felt well-supported and mentored by the Director of the Architecture Department,” said that their “fellowship allowed [them] the time and space to develop teaching and research around a chosen topic and position myself for tenure-track positions.”

Yet when asked how their program could be improved, 10 out of 12 respondents mentioned precisely the need for time: more time for research, longer fellowship contracts or earlier notices of rehiring, or more balance in the teaching workload. Some excerpts:

“My fellowship was only one year. This short period of time limits forces the fellow to start applying for other employment opportunities as soon as they arrive at the institution. Longer durations would allow the fellow to settle in and focus on research/teaching without worrying about future employment right away.”

“The biggest gap was the duration of a single academic year, not allowing time for ‘landing’ another job after the first year.”

“Lighten teaching load for all. Make it two years.”

“I think all fellowships should be a 2 to 3 years appointment. They should also reduce the teaching load. ... The pressure to produce a brilliant project, learn to teach, publish and generate high-level, innovative, student work can be a tall order.”

“I think two-year fellowships contribute to more stability of teaching positions, whereas I think one-year fellowships are too precarious. A great deal of pressure to produce is put upon fellows, who are often just one pay tier above adjunct.”

“Generally speaking across academic admins, it would be great if decisions to hire or renew would be made earlier, so that those on imminently expiring visas aren’t left to scramble at the last minute.”

This suggests that many fellows find it difficult to produce exceptional work while teaching new courses, let alone re-apply for academic jobs and renew visas; it is a process that can create discontinuity (and stress) for early career scholars. This theme of workload and (not enough) time seems to relate to material conditions such as salary, available resources at the school, as well as intangible support such as the degree of mentorship one receives.

3.3 Mentorship & Cohort

Across the board, mentorship was highly valued, desired, and appreciated. Collegiality was also a key factor in feeling supported by the school, a view shared particularly by those who had a cohort of fellows in their institutions. Some excerpts:

“I also think my fellowship was especially good because of the mentorship I received from the Chair of the department and a couple of colleagues. I would urge all schools to embed appropriate and even formal mentorship practices to all their fellowship opportunities, especially in order to help fellows navigate future job searches, job talks, and the like.”

“The school had resources available, but it was largely up to me to figure out how to navigate my access and to create connections.”

“I wish there was more mentorship from senior faculty and guidance on teaching and research

since I was completely new to it.”

“..The goals of the fellowship were not well defined and there could have been more mentorship and guidance...”

“...I wish there was some more mentorship and guidance with respect to teaching and developing curricula.”

“Provide a dedicated mentor to each fellow.”

“Mentorship and collegial trust networks are important for early career scholars, especially in a small school...”

“I didn’t have a lot of mentorship but did forge good bonds with the few junior faculty at the school...”

“I was part of a cohort of 6 fellows, all of whom were phenomenal.”

“I am especially grateful to my fellow fellows who continue to teach me so much!!!!!!!!!!!!”

While seemingly intangible, these soft supports seem to contribute to a fellowship’s overall “efficacy,” providing some continuity and networks to the early career scholar between academic jobs. It reminds us that fellowships are not autonomous self-driving structures; mentorship and collegial guidance is essential to the academic pipeline if schools wish to see emerging scholars thrive in the longer term. Conference presentations and panel presentations are valued similarly to other disciplines, as are invited public lectures. One element that distinguishes architecture from other fields in terms of public presentation are guest critics for design reviews. It is customary in schools of architecture to invite either architects and/or fellow academics to participate in juries for end-of-term studio reviews. There may be some ambiguity as to whether reviews should fall under “service” or “teaching,” but it should not be part of a research dossier. The work of “juror” in a design competition should be considered part of “service.” However, in the event that it shapes the discipline in profound ways and has greater impact value, it is up to candidates to frame their work in this arena in the larger context of their research and practice.

3.4 Material Resources

Adequate salary and stable employment are both issues structural to the profession and academia writ large, and is an obvious, material form of support. Respondents acknowledged how pay factored into the success of their fellowship; we received responses from those who felt adequately paid as well as those who felt underpaid, or that the system broadly was underpaid. One pinpointed that “the program could use additional funding, starting with a more appropriate moving stipend, and additional research funds.” Conversely, administrators voiced concerns about funding the fellowship in perpetuity. On top of general academic labor, fellowships tend to require additional resources for producing a body of highly public work in a condensed timeframe. Here, respondents generally identified the provision of research funding, exhibition venue, and student assistants as key to this work.

“The main feeling of precarity caused by fellowships, in my opinion, is finishing them and realizing there is often no job in sight at the institution, aside from a very low-pay adjunct position.”

“My fellowship was relatively well compensated and long enough that it made sense to move (plus the school covered moving expenses). I don’t think the fellowships are all that different from other early-career full-time teaching jobs, so whether or not they’re exploitative/ stable/

precarious depends on the same factors -- length of contract, compensation, and to a lesser extent, research support.”

3.5 Stability v Precarity; Privilege v Equality

Who can afford to take on a fellowship? In addition to increasing exploitation in the adjunct realm, low wages may also signal or encourage a type of privilege in who can perform such academic work: it “basically assume[s] you have multiple streams of income” or you “don’t have kids”. Another respondent makes the reverse case: “Adjunct faculty... [who] have to relocate to often remote destinations far from family and support networks do not represent a privileged position within the hierarchy of the academy.” Both positions articulate a conundrum of academic precarity, in which a fellow is either privileged enough to pick up and move for short-term low-wage work, or is so underpaid that they simply cannot afford to stay in place. One fellow notes that simply “adjusting to a new place took a lot of energy,” and because of this they were not able to do research beyond what was directly tied to their teaching. The fellowship may also be a privilege most accessible to those who went to “Ivy League or Ivy League-adjacent institutions”. One respondent does make a positive reflection about the fellowship’s limited structure: “When the terms are not exploitative, I think they’re a great way for young potential educators to test the waters, and vice versa, without schools having to take a leap of faith on people who haven’t taught much before and without the educators having to take truly underpaid adjunct positions in order to build a teaching record.”

A follow-up question is whether life after fellowships becomes more or less precarious: not all respondents got tenure-track positions right away, and had to adjunct for some years. One took up a “visiting professor” role that was even more insecure than the fellowship; it has put them off continuing in that position. Looking around them, one remarked on a longer-term trend: “Even my former colleagues from [school X] have had a hard time landing in stable jobs.”

Are these programs contributing to privilege or equality in the discipline? One respondent thinks “they have become a way to ‘tick boxes’ in many institutions, especially when it comes to DEI efforts. In those cases, it exacerbates the precarity of teaching positions and puts pressure precisely on the peoples it is meant to be helping.” That said, fellowships can work towards equality as a platform that is far more accessible and inclusive than academia has historically been: “I would’ve never imagined someone of my color, gender, and interests - would have a space in an academic setting;” “they are helping create more equal opportunities for people who might not have otherwise had access to academia.” Another respondent makes a suggestion: “These structures can be mutually [beneficial] if they take the candidate’s long-term development into consideration.”

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the survey, some pragmatic considerations emerged:

4.1 Duration

Fellowships should be at least two years long to be sustainable for the fellow: first to relocate and adjust, then to create scholarship and teaching commensurate with what is being asked of the position, and finally to be able to apply for the next position (which can make or break one's future stability). Nearly all of the administrators we engaged spoke of funding as the most significant challenge or limitation to the continued success of their fellowship programs. The nature of the funding structure impacts the length of the fellowship, the amount of support and mentorship fellows receive, and the definition of the full-time appointment, particularly in unionized schools.

4.2 More Expectations = More Time

The do-it-all fellowship model needs to be reconsidered. As one respondent put it: "I think sometimes architects are asked to do too much in the academic setting – teach, publish, and have a practice... Fellowships could be more directed and focused." If a program requires an exhibition outcome, the fellow's teaching load should be reduced accordingly. If it demands heavy teaching or course coordination, then the prospect of less research time should be acknowledged up front. The expectations of a fellowship could be more clearly defined, and aligned with its realities of research / teaching / service.

4.3 Soft Support

More mentorship should be provided by schools, especially as fellows are treated as new FT faculty members and as many fellows join in hopes of starting a teaching career. Mentorship could engage teaching, developing curricula, the job search process, general guidance on administrative processes, and just checking in. Consider cohort hires as well as joining institution structures that offer mentorship as cohorts (the Dean's Equity and Inclusion Initiative comes to mind).

4.4 Material Support

Higher pay commensurate with the work, sensible relocation stipend, possibly even housing. Not to be treated as a teaching stopgap. More structurally speaking, both fellows and adjunct faculty should be paid better given the amount of work, rather than one creating a pay gap over the other.

4.5 Research and/or Representation

Generally, administrators viewed the fellowship programs as mutually beneficial to the fellows – who are given a venue early in their careers to build up a body of teaching/research evidence and experience – and the schools – who have an opportunity to increase the balance of their faculty with regards to BIPOC and gender, as well as broaden pedagogical approaches and research agendas not currently present in their full-time faculty. It was noted that not all schools exist within a legal/political context that would allow them to explicitly target DEI candidates for their fellowship programs, even if that is their implied intent. Schools should acknowledge the additional responsibilities that come with caring for students who identify with fellowship faculty, service work that is often seen but not within the scope of the job.

APPENDIX

Architecture Fellowships

*** denotes Architecture Fellowships on Social Equity and Climate Justice*

Auburn University	University At Buffalo, SUNY
California State Polytechnic University, Pomona	University of Arizona
Carnegie Mellon University	University of California, Berkeley**
City College of New York	University of Colorado Denver
Clemson University	University of Detroit Mercy**
Columbia University**	University of Illinois at Chicago
Cornell University**	University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign
Dalhousie University	University of Manitoba
Drexel University	University of Maryland
Drury University	University of Miami
Florida Atlantic University	University of Michigan**
Georgia Institute of Technology	University of Minnesota**
Harvard University**	University of North Carolina at Charlotte
Illinois Institute of Technology	University of Notre Dame
Iowa State University	University of Oregon**
Kansas State University	University of Pennsylvania**
Massachusetts Institute of Technology	University of Texas at Arlington
Pennsylvania State University	University of Texas at Austin
Pratt Institute School of Architecture	University of Texas At San Antonio
Princeton University	University of Virginia**
Rice University**	University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee**
School of the Art Institute of Chicago	Virginia Tech
Syracuse University	Washington University in St. Louis
Temple University	Woodbury University
The Ohio State University	Yale University
Tulane University	

APPENDIX

2022-2023 ACSA Leadership Committee Members

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